



Attachment No. 1

Building a brighter future for the children in your community

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Partnering with the Alliance of Western Councils

September 2023

Putting it into perspective

United Way Australia – Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library video

Topics covered

- Why focus on early literacy?
- Dolly Parton's Imagination Library & its impact
- Focus on AWC Region
- Partnership with Local Government
- Where to from here?



Imagine

**.. an Australia where
every child starts
school ready to learn**



Australian Early Development Census highlights children at risk

22% of Australian children start school developmentally vulnerable

– a statistic that is even higher for children living in low socio-economic areas.

Research shows that if these children start school behind, they're likely to continue on a poor developmental trajectory at school and in later life.

A child's postcode shouldn't determine their potential

We understand the problem, and we have a simple, affordable way to tackle it that helps prepare kids for learning.



Why focus on Early Literacy?

- 50% of language is learnt by age 4
- 90% of brain development occurs by age 5
- By age two, 75% of a child's brain growth has occurred and a child's language development can predict outcomes at age 26
- 1 in 5 Australian children are not developmentally ready for school when they turn 5
- 1 in 3 with reading difficulty will never catch up
- 70% of student who don't complete Yr. 12 have poor literacy skills

Children with access to at least 20 books in the home reach an overall higher level of educational attainment than those without, regardless of the parent's education, occupation, and socioeconomic status

Low Reading skill and poor health have found to be related

The impact of poor literacy is devastating

- welfare dependency
- poor health outcomes
- lack of social cohesion
- higher levels of crime and lack of self-worth
- higher rates of dropping out of school
- decreased earning potential
- limited ability to engage in activities that require critical thinking or a solid base of literacy and numeracy

The everyday effects of poor literacy skills

- Communicating by email
- connecting by social media
- reading a medicine label
- completing a job application
- reading workplace correspondence
- filling out a home loan application
- comparing the cost of two items
- voting in elections
- calculating finances
- shopping online
- achieving a higher education degree or training
- helping their children with homework



Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

United Way Australia is the Australian Licensee of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a community-based, early literacy intervention program that brings the magic of a library into the home of a child with the gift of a book.

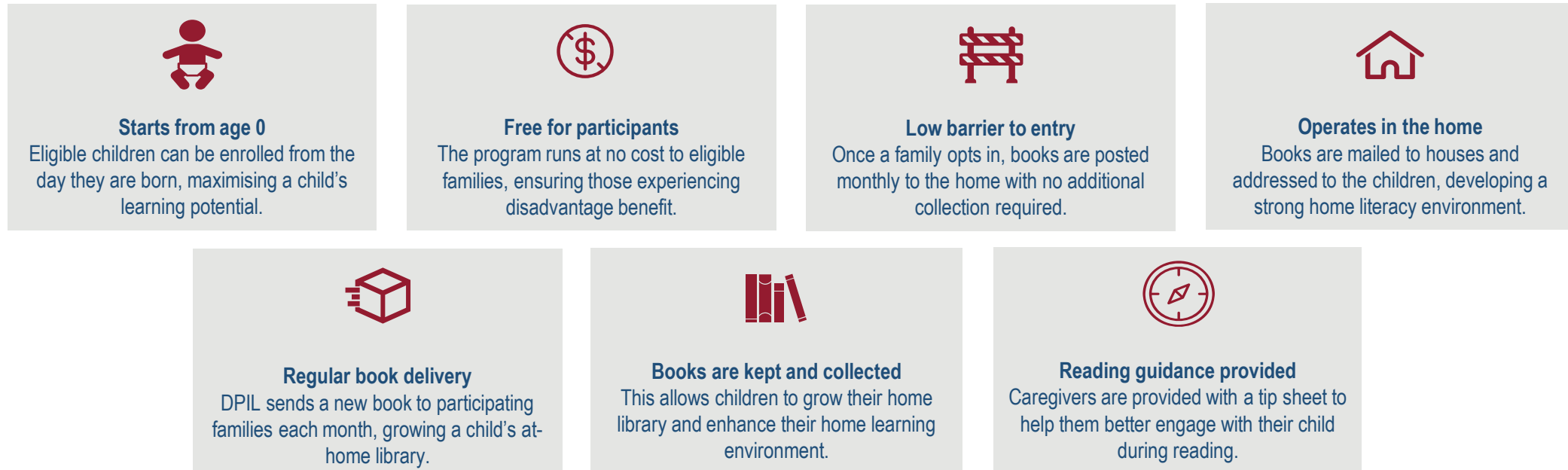
The Imagination Library supports parents as their child's first and most important teacher and takes a proven first step towards sparking curiosity, a love of reading and learning.



The Imagination Library is a free book-gifting program building literacy readiness before children start school.

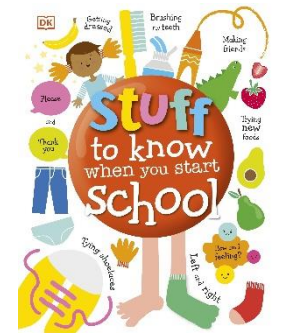
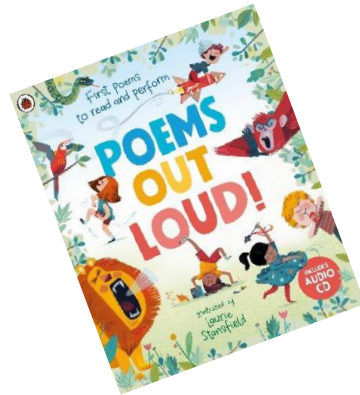
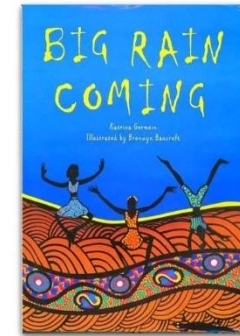
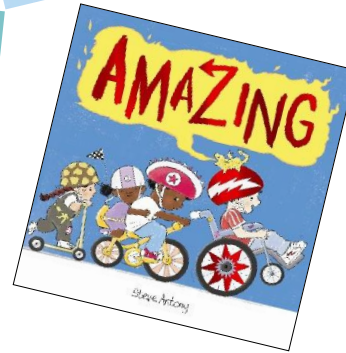
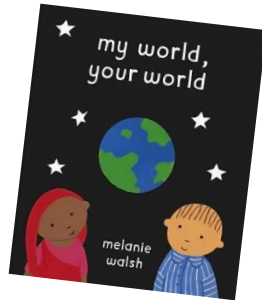
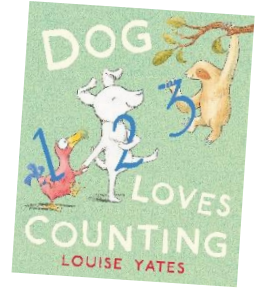
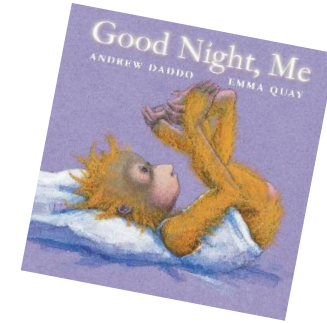
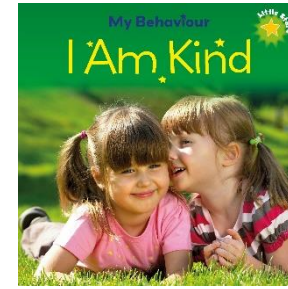
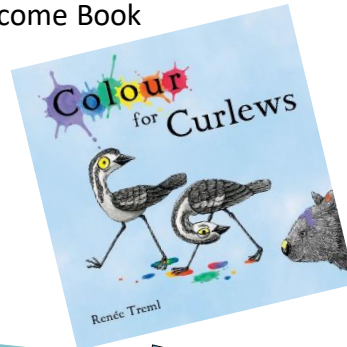
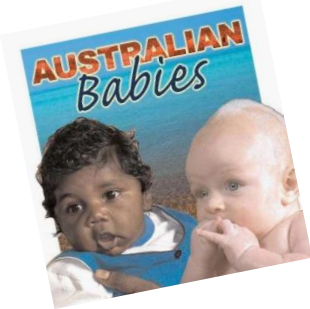
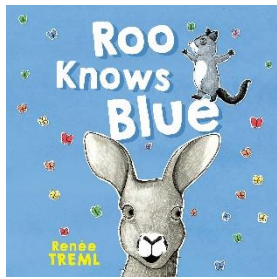


Key features:



2023 Australian Book List - Samples

All children receive **Roo Knows Blue** by Renée Trembl as their Welcome Book



The program is making an impact on the home literacy environment

2020-2012 National Impact Report Key Findings:

Caregivers who read daily or more at baseline were **10 times** more likely to read daily or more at 6 months, than those who did not read daily or more at baseline

79% of children had more than 25 books in the home at 6-months, which is double that of a study of nearly one million Australian children which found only 44% of children had more than 25 books by 2 years of age.

86% of caregivers surveyed reported spending more quality time as a family with books

75% of children over 3 years of age demonstrated emerging literacy skills including recognizing alphabet letters after 6 months of receiving the Imagination Library

Research shows that **shared book reading with the child** is key



2021-2022 National Impact Report Key Findings N=228

Frequency

After 6 months of receiving the books 70% of caregivers were reading daily or more to the child which is higher than a large Australian study (N~5,000) of children that found 60% of children were read to 6-7 days in the last week aged between 0-1 years.

Caregivers who read daily or more at baseline were 10 times more likely to read daily or more at 6 months than those who did not read daily or more at baseline.

Books in the home

79% of children had more than 25 books in the home at 6-months which is nearly double that of a study of nearly one million Australian children which found only 44% of children had more than 25 books by 2 years.

Caregivers

The Imagination Library increases caregiver confidence and enjoyment.

86% of caregivers surveyed reported spending more quality time as a family with books.

The Imagination Library increases the use of reading techniques known to be beneficial for language acquisition and development.

Emergent literacy skills

75% of children over 3 years of age demonstrated emergent literacy skills including recognising alphabet letters after only 6 months of receiving the Imagination Library.

An Impact Assessment of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Australia was conducted in 2022. Based on survey data about families' shared reading habits compared to a control group, **the program offers a four-for-one return on investment. In vulnerable communities this ROI is likely to be higher.**



Shared book reading helps children develop early literacy skills, resulting in improved Year 3 NAPLAN scores



The Imagination Library has a unique offering, and a track record of impact in Australia



There is a robust body of peer-reviewed research evidence showing that the Imagination Library improves shared reading behaviour and strengthens early literacy skills



Program evidence shows that the Imagination Library is delivering strong results in Australia



It also suggests that the benefits of the program go beyond shared book reading and early literacy, and include strengthened connections within and between families and the broader community

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Economic analysis suggests that the program breaks even on its original investment if around one in twenty families start reading to their child 6-7 days per week as a result of the program

NSW LGAs ranked by Department of Education's vulnerability index

Local Government Area (2016 Name)	DPIE Planning Region	2019 NSW Health Birth Rates	Overall Vulnerability Ranking	Local Government Area (2016 Name)	DPIE Planning Region	2019 NSW Health Birth Rates	Overall Vulnerability Ranking	Local Government Area (2016 Name)	DPIE Planning Region	2019 NSW Health Birth Rates	Overall Vulnerability Ranking	Local Government Area (2016 Name)	DPIE Planning Region	2019 NSW Health Birth Rates	Overall Vulnerability Ranking
Coonamble (A)	Central West and Orana Region	75	1	Campbelltown (C) (NSW)	Greater Sydney Region	2,651	36	Bogan (A)	Central West and Orana Region	43	71	Snowy Monaro Regional (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	167	106
Walgett (A)	Far West Region	75	2	Temora (A)	Riverina Murray Region	59	37	Greater Hume Shire (A)	Riverina Murray Region	7	72	Strathfield (A)	Greater Sydney Region	501	107
Tenterfield (A)	New England North West Region	15	3	Gunnedah (A)	New England North West Region	191	38	Penrith (C)	Greater Sydney Region	3,324	73	Byron (A)	North Coast Region	295	108
Glen Innes Severn (A)	New England North West Region	76	4	Dubbo Regional (A)	Central West and Orana Region	805	39	Carrathool (A)	Riverina Murray Region	41	74	Camden (A)	Greater Sydney Region	1,968	109
Fairfield (C)	Greater Sydney Region	2,289	5	Wentworth (A)	Far West Region	3	40	Maitland (C)	Hunter Region	1,163	75	Ryde (C)	Greater Sydney Region	1,556	110
Brewarrina (A)	Far West Region	14	6	Walcha (A)	New England North West Region	26	41	Port Stephens (A)	Hunter Region	723	76	Randwick (C)	Greater Sydney Region	1,660	111
Richmond Valley (A)	North Coast Region	253	7	Liverpool (C)	Greater Sydney Region	3,373	42	Forbes (A)	Central West and Orana Region	127	77	Upper Lachlan Shire (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	52	112
Kempsey (A)	North Coast Region	360	8	Clarence Valley (A)	North Coast Region	475	43	Berrigan (A)	Riverina Murray Region	7	78	Inner West (A)	Greater Sydney Region	2,140	113
Warrumbungle Shire (A)	Central West and Orana Region	92	9	Lismore (C)	North Coast Region	425	44	Orange (C)	Central West and Orana Region	627	79	Canada Bay (A)	Greater Sydney Region	1,097	114
Central Darling (A)	Far West Region	18	10	Uralla (A)	New England North West Region	52	45	Wollongong (C)	Illawarra-Shoalhaven Region	2,401	80	Waverley (A)	Greater Sydney Region	1,007	115
Bourke (A)	Far West Region	29	11	Cobar (A)	Far West Region	63	46	Central Coast (C) (NSW)	Central Coast Region	3,788	81	Willoughby (C)	Greater Sydney Region	827	116
Nambucca (A)	North Coast Region	207	12	Eurobodalla (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	267	47	Weddin (A)	Central West and Orana Region	25	82	Wollondilly (A)	Greater Sydney Region	704	117
Broken Hill (C)	Far West Region	185	13	Muswellbrook (A)	Hunter Region	218	48	Tweed (A)	North Coast Region	711	83	Mosman (A)	Greater Sydney Region	290	118
Kyogle (A)	North Coast Region	92	14	Armidale Regional (A)	New England North West Region	344	49	Dungog (A)	Hunter Region	91	84	Sutherland Shire (A)	Greater Sydney Region	2,547	119
Gyandarra (A)	Central West and Orana Region	53	15	Tamworth Regional (A)	New England North West Region	792	50	Mid-Western Regional (A)	Central West and Orana Region	279	85	Woollahra (A)	Greater Sydney Region	575	120
Moree Plains (A)	New England North West Region	163	16	Griffith (C)	Riverina Murray Region	364	51	Oberon (A)	Central West and Orana Region	45	86	Hornsby (A)	Greater Sydney Region	1,451	121
Lithgow (C)	Central West and Orana Region	189	17	Coolamon (A)	Riverina Murray Region	42	52	Ballina (A)	North Coast Region	389	87	Northern Beaches (A)	Greater Sydney Region	2,847	122
Junee (A)	Riverina Murray Region	56	18	Bathurst Regional (A)	Central West and Orana Region	476	53	Blayney (A)	Central West and Orana Region	78	88	Ku-ring-gai (A)	Greater Sydney Region	871	123
Cowra (A)	Central West and Orana Region	119	19	Federation (A)	Riverina Murray Region	5	54	Singleton (A)	Hunter Region	317	89	Lane Cove (A)	Greater Sydney Region	543	124
Hay (A)	Riverina Murray Region	26	20	Hilltops (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	178	55	Wagga Wagga (C)	Riverina Murray Region	881	90	Hunters Hill (A)	Greater Sydney Region	105	125
Cessnock (C)	Hunter Region	808	21	Narrandera (A)	Riverina Murray Region	71	56	Bland (A)	Riverina Murray Region	65	91	North Sydney (A)	Greater Sydney Region	956	126
Cumberland (A)	Greater Sydney Region	4,166	22	Balranald (A)	Far West Region	1	57	Lake Macquarie (C)	Hunter Region	2,365	92	The Hills Shire (A)	Greater Sydney Region	1,868	127
Narrromine (A)	Central West and Orana Region	77	23	Leeton (A)	Riverina Murray Region	155	58	Bayside (A)	Greater Sydney Region	2,361	93	Unincorporated NSW	Far West Region	12	128
Snowy Valleys (A)	Riverina Murray Region	157	24	Shoalhaven (C)	Illawarra-Shoalhaven Region	1,065	59	Newcastle (C)	Hunter Region	1,874	94	Kiama (A)	Illawarra-Shoalhaven Region	198	129
Narrabri (A)	New England North West Region	171	25	Coffs Harbour (C)	North Coast Region	839	60	Yass Valley (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	26	95				
Canterbury-Bankstown (A)	Greater Sydney Region	4,946	26	Murray River (A)	Riverina Murray Region	5	61	Wingecarribee (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	468	96				
Warren (A)	Central West and Orana Region	37	27	Edward River (A)	Riverina Murray Region	66	62	Lockhart (A)	Riverina Murray Region	30	97				
Liverpool Plains (A)	New England North West Region	86	28	Port Macquarie-Hastings (A)	North Coast Region	738	63	Bellingen (A)	North Coast Region	103	98				
Lachlan (A)	Central West and Orana Region	96	29	Burwood (A)	Greater Sydney Region	332	64	Georges River (A)	Greater Sydney Region	1,658	99				
Inverell (A)	New England North West Region	225	30	Gundagai (A)	Riverina Murray Region	110	65	Sydney (C)	Greater Sydney Region	2,022	100				
Parkes (A)	Central West and Orana Region	184	31	Goulburn Mulwaree (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	280	66	Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	405	101				
Mid-Coast (A)	Hunter Region	762	32	Upper Hunter Shire (A)	Hunter Region	155	67	Cabonne (A)	Central West and Orana Region	136	102				
Murrumbidgee (A)	Riverina Murray Region	31	33	Blacktown (C)	Greater Sydney Region	5,876	68	Parramatta (C)	Greater Sydney Region	3,595	103				
Gwydir (A)	New England North West Region	30	34	Bega Valley (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	239	69	Hawkesbury (C)	Greater Sydney Region	850	104				
Albury (C)	Riverina Murray Region	716	35	Shellharbour (C)	Illawarra-Shoalhaven Region	871	70	Blue Mountains (C)	Greater Sydney Region	718	105				

Parameters and weightings

Developmental vulnerability on two or more AEDC domains (40%) – 2018 AEDC		
Level of socio-economic disadvantage using Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) (30%) – 2016 ABS		
Proportion of population aged 0 to 5 that is vulnerable (30%) – 2016 ABS		

NSW LGAs ranked by Department of Education's vulnerability index

Local Government Area (2016 Name)	DPIE Planning Region	2019 NSW Health Birth Rates	Overall Vulnerability Ranking
Coonamble (A)	Central West and Orana Region	75	1
Walgett (A)	Far West Region	75	2
Tenterfield (A)	New England North West Region	15	3
Glen Innes Severn (A)	New England North West Region	76	4
Fairfield (C)	Greater Sydney Region	2,289	5
Brewarrina (A)	Far West Region	14	6
Richmond Valley (A)	North Coast Region	253	7
Kempsey (A)	North Coast Region	360	8
Warrumbungle Shire (A)	Central West and Orana Region	92	9
Central Darling (A)	Far West Region	18	10
Bourke (A)	Far West Region	29	11
Nambucca (A)	North Coast Region	207	12
Broken Hill (C)	Far West Region	185	13
Kyogle (A)	North Coast Region	92	14
Gilgandra (A)	Central West and Orana Region	53	15
Moree Plains (A)	New England North West Region	163	16
Lithgow (C)	Central West and Orana Region	189	17
Junee (A)	Riverina Murray Region	56	18
Cowra (A)	Central West and Orana Region	119	19
Hay (A)	Riverina Murray Region	26	20
Cessnock (C)	Hunter Region	808	21
Cumberland (A)	Greater Sydney Region	4,166	22
Narromine (A)	Central West and Orana Region	77	23
Snowy Valleys (A)	Riverina Murray Region	157	24
Narrabri (A)	New England North West Region	171	25
Canterbury-Bankstown (A)	Greater Sydney Region	4,946	26
Warren (A)	Central West and Orana Region	37	27
Liverpool Plains (A)	New England North West Region	86	28
Lachlan (A)	Central West and Orana Region	96	29
Inverell (A)	New England North West Region	225	30
Parkes (A)	Central West and Orana Region	184	31
Mid-Coast (A)	Hunter Region	762	32
Murrumbidgee (A)	Riverina Murray Region	31	33
Gwydir (A)	New England North West Region	30	34
Albury (C)	Riverina Murray Region	716	35

Local Government Area (2016 Name)	DPIE Planning Region	2019 NSW Health Birth Rates	Overall Vulnerability Ranking
Campbelltown (C) (NSW)	Greater Sydney Region	2,651	36
Temora (A)	Riverina Murray Region	59	37
Gunnedah (A)	New England North West Region	191	38
Dubbo Regional (A)	Central West and Orana Region	805	39
Wentworth (A)	Far West Region	3	40
Walcha (A)	New England North West Region	26	41
Liverpool (C)	Greater Sydney Region	3,373	42
Clarence Valley (A)	North Coast Region	475	43
Lismore (C)	North Coast Region	425	44
Uralla (A)	New England North West Region	52	45
Cobar (A)	Far West Region	63	46
Eurobodalla (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	267	47
Muswellbrook (A)	Hunter Region	218	48
Armidale Regional (A)	New England North West Region	344	49
Tamworth Regional (A)	New England North West Region	792	50
Griffith (C)	Riverina Murray Region	364	51
Coolamon (A)	Riverina Murray Region	42	52
Bathurst Regional (A)	Central West and Orana Region	476	53
Federation (A)	Riverina Murray Region	5	54
Hilltops (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	178	55
Narrandera (A)	Riverina Murray Region	71	56
Balranald (A)	Far West Region	1	57
Leeton (A)	Riverina Murray Region	155	58
Shoalhaven (C)	Illawarra-Shoalhaven Region	1,065	59
Coffs Harbour (C)	North Coast Region	839	60
Murray River (A)	Riverina Murray Region	5	61
Edward River (A)	Riverina Murray Region	66	62
Port Macquarie-Hastings (A)	North Coast Region	738	63
Burwood (A)	Greater Sydney Region	332	64
Gundagai (A)	Riverina Murray Region	110	65
Goulburn Mulwaree (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	280	66
Upper Hunter Shire (A)	Hunter Region	155	67
Blacktown (C)	Greater Sydney Region	5,876	68
Bega Valley (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	239	69
Shellharbour (C)	Illawarra-Shoalhaven Region	871	70

Local Government Area (2016 Name)	DPIE Planning Region	2019 NSW Health Birth Rates	Overall Vulnerability Ranking
Bogan (A)	Central West and Orana Region	43	71
Greater Hume Shire (A)	Riverina Murray Region	7	72
Penrith (C)	Greater Sydney Region	3,324	73
Carrathool (A)	Riverina Murray Region	41	74
Maitland (C)	Hunter Region	1,163	75
Port Stephens (A)	Hunter Region	723	76
Forbes (A)	Central West and Orana Region	127	77
Berrigan (A)	Riverina Murray Region	7	78
Orange (C)	Central West and Orana Region	627	79
Wollongong (C)	Illawarra-Shoalhaven Region	2,401	80
Central Coast (C) (NSW)	Central Coast Region	3,788	81
Weddin (A)	Central West and Orana Region	25	82
Tweed (A)	North Coast Region	711	83
Dungog (A)	Hunter Region	91	84
Mid-Western Regional (A)	Central West and Orana Region	279	85
Oberon (A)	Central West and Orana Region	45	86
Ballina (A)	North Coast Region	389	87
Blayney (A)	Central West and Orana Region	78	88
Singleton (A)	Hunter Region	317	89
Wagga Wagga (C)	Riverina Murray Region	881	90
Bland (A)	Riverina Murray Region	65	91
Lake Macquarie (C)	Hunter Region	2,365	92
Bayside (A)	Greater Sydney Region	2,361	93
Newcastle (C)	Hunter Region	1,874	94
Yass Valley (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	26	95
Wingecarribee (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	468	96
Lockhart (A)	Riverina Murray Region	30	97
Bellingen (A)	North Coast Region	103	98
Georges River (A)	Greater Sydney Region	1,658	99
Sydney (C)	Greater Sydney Region	2,022	100
Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	405	101
Cabonne (A)	Central West and Orana Region	136	102
Parramatta (C)	Greater Sydney Region	3,595	103
Hawkesbury (C)	Greater Sydney Region	850	104
Blue Mountains (C)	Greater Sydney Region	718	105

Local Government Area (2016 Name)	DPIE Planning Region	2019 NSW Health Birth Rates	Overall Vulnerability Ranking
		Vulnerability ranking (out of 129 LGAs)	
Coonamble			1
Walgett			2
Brewarrina			6
Warrumbungle			9
Central Darling			10
Bourke			11
Gilgandra			15
Narromine			23
Warren			27
Dubbo Regional			39
Cobar			46
Bogan			71
Mid-Western			85

NSW Government funded 25 LGAs

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Coonamble (A)	Central West and Orana Region	75	1
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Lithgow (C)	Central West and Orana Region	189	17
Junee (A)	Riverina Murray Region	56	18
Cowra (A)	Central West and Orana Region	119	19
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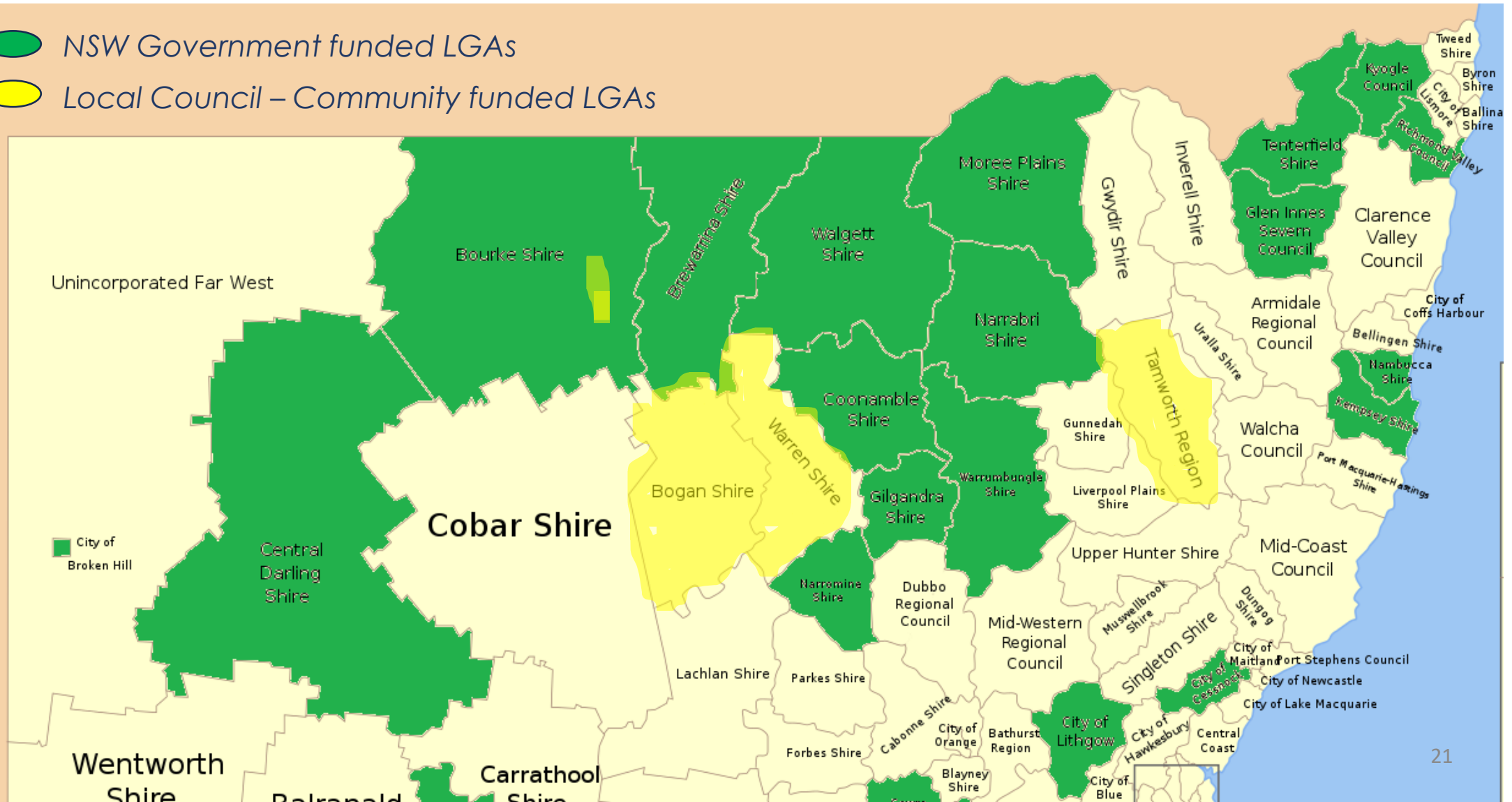
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Coolamon (A)	Riverina Murray Region	42	52
Bathurst Regional (A)	Central West and Orana Region	476	53
Federation (A)	Riverina Murray Region	5	54
Hilltops (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	178	55
Narrandera (A)	Riverina Murray Region	71	56
Balranald (A)	Far West Region	1	57
Leeton (A)	Riverina Murray Region	155	58
Shoalhaven (C)	Illawarra-Shoalhaven Region	1,065	59
Coffs Harbour (C)	North Coast Region	839	60
Murray River (A)	Riverina Murray Region	5	61
Edward River (A)	Riverina Murray Region	66	62
Port Macquarie-Hastings (A)	North Coast Region	738	63
Burwood (A)	Greater Sydney Region	332	64
Gundagai (A)	Riverina Murray Region	110	65
Goulburn Mulwaree (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	280	66
Upper Hunter Shire (A)	Hunter Region	155	67
Blacktown (C)	Greater Sydney Region	5,876	68
Bega Valley (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	239	69
Shellharbour (C)	Illawarra-Shoalhaven Region	871	70

Local Government Area (2016 Name)	DPIE Planning Region	2019 NSW Health Birth Rates	Overall Vulnerability Ranking
Bogan (A)	Central West and Orana Region	43	71
Greater Hume Shire (A)	Riverina Murray Region	7	72
Penrith (C)	Greater Sydney Region	3,324	73
Carrathool (A)	Riverina Murray Region	41	74
Maitland (C)	Hunter Region	1,163	75
Port Stephens (A)	Hunter Region	723	76
Forbes (A)	Central West and Orana Region	127	77
Berrigan (A)	Riverina Murray Region	7	78
Orange (C)	Central West and Orana Region	627	79
Wollongong (C)	Illawarra-Shoalhaven Region	2,401	80
Central Coast (C) (NSW)	Central Coast Region	3,788	81
Weddin (A)	Central West and Orana Region	25	82
Tweed (A)	North Coast Region	711	83
Dungog (A)	Hunter Region	91	84
Mid-Western Regional (A)	Central West and Orana Region	279	85
Oberon (A)	Central West and Orana Region	45	86
Ballina (A)	North Coast Region	389	87
Blayney (A)	Central West and Orana Region	78	88
Singleton (A)	Hunter Region	317	89
Wagga Wagga (C)	Riverina Murray Region	881	90
Bland (A)	Riverina Murray Region	65	91
Lake Macquarie (C)	Hunter Region	2,365	92
Bayside (A)	Greater Sydney Region	2,361	93
Newcastle (C)	Hunter Region	1,874	94
Yass Valley (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	26	95
Wingecarribee (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	468	96
Lockhart (A)	Riverina Murray Region	30	97
Bellingen (A)	North Coast Region	103	98
Georges River (A)	Greater Sydney Region	1,658	99
Sydney (C)	Greater Sydney Region	2,022	100
Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional (A)	South East and Tablelands Region	405	101
Cabonne (A)	Central West and Orana Region	136	102
Parramatta (C)	Greater Sydney Region	3,595	103
Hawkesbury (C)	Greater Sydney Region	850	104
Blue Mountains (C)	Greater Sydney Region	718	105

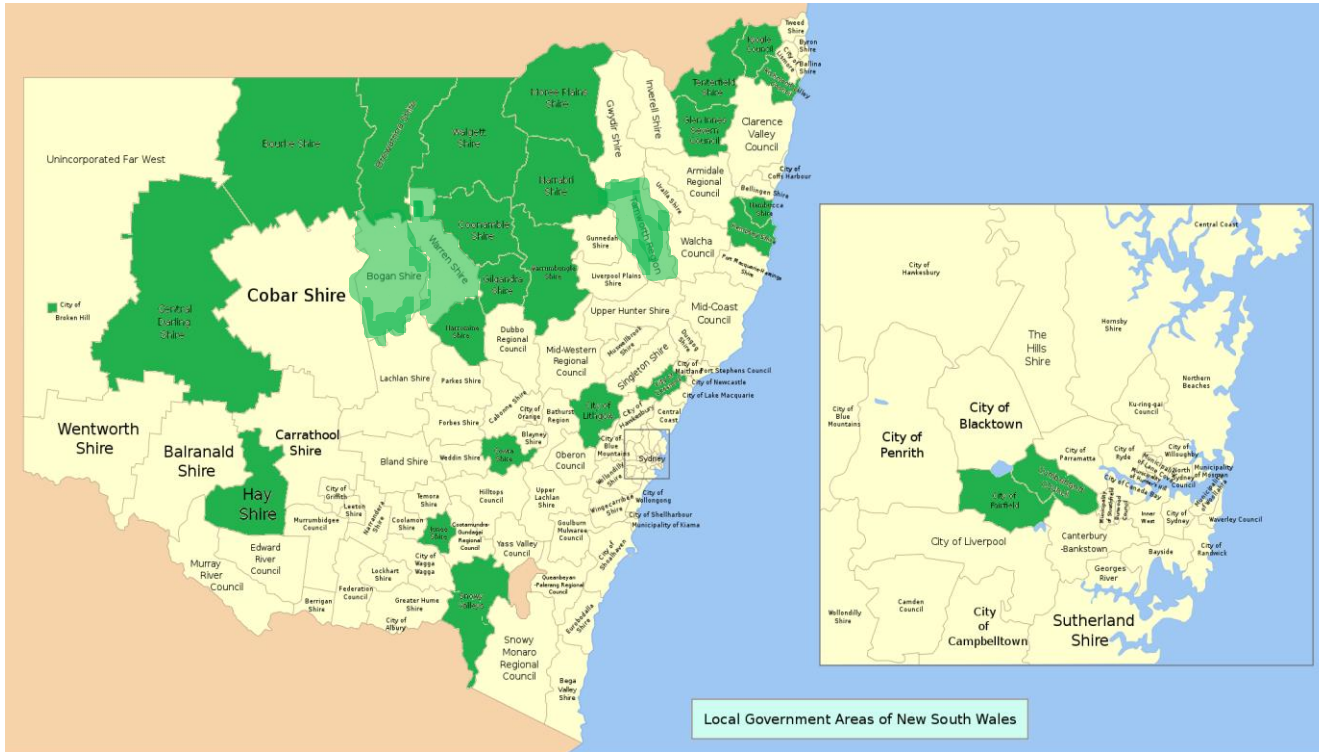
Local Government Area (2016 Name)	DPIE Planning Region	2019 NSW Health Birth Rates	Overall Vulnerability Ranking
LGA		Vulnerability ranking (out of 129 LGAs)	
Coonamble			1
Walgett			2
Brewarrina			6
Warrumbungle			9
Central Darling			10
Bourke			11
Gilgandra			15
Narromine			23
Warren			27
Dubbo Regional			39
Cobar			46
Bogan			71
Mid-Western			85

'Whole of Community' programs in Northern NSW

- NSW Government funded LGAs
- Local Council – Community funded LGAs



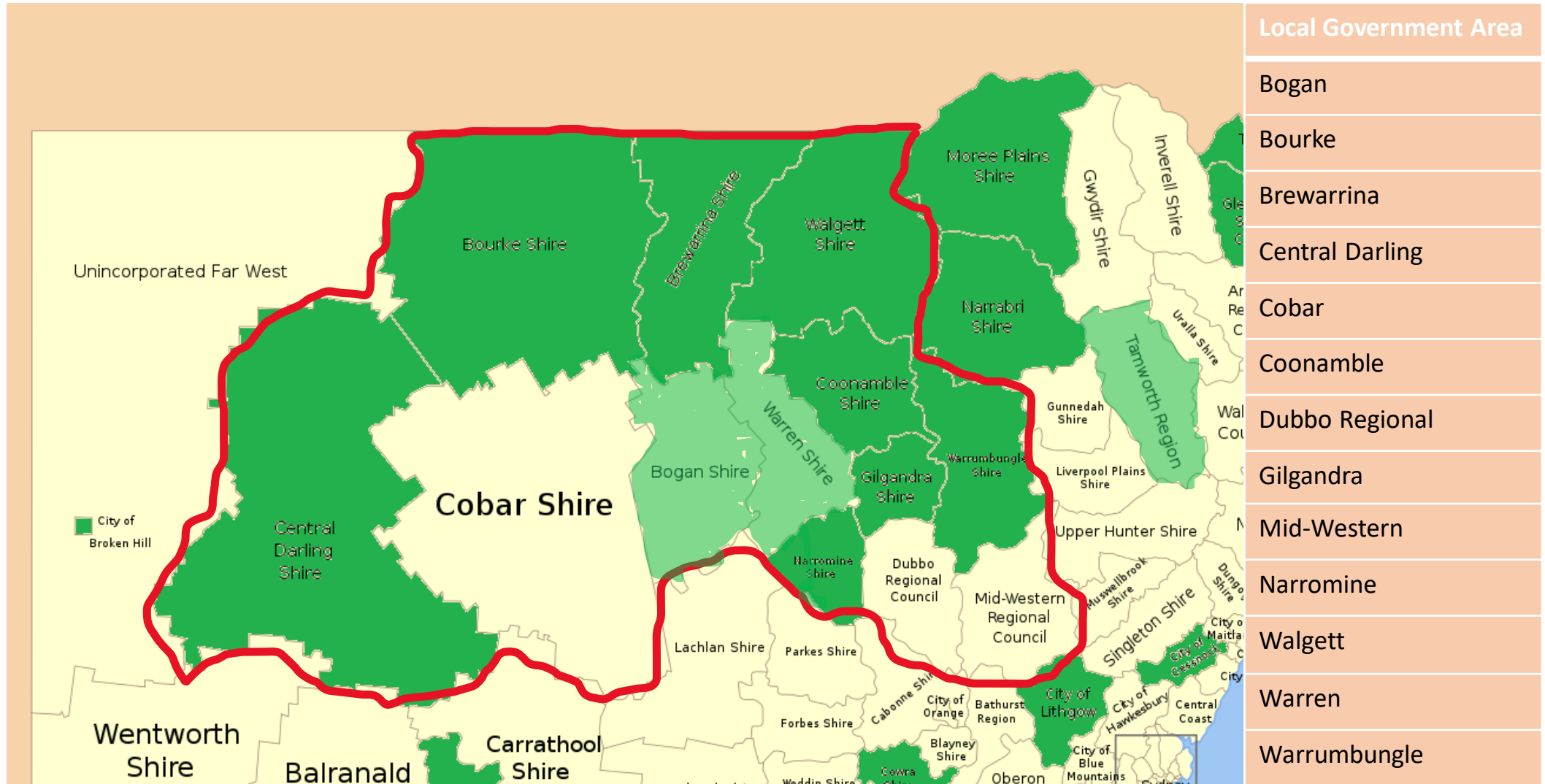
Partnerships with 28 Councils and 9 Local Health Districts across NSW



Local Health District	Local Government Area
South Western Sydney	Fairfield
Western Sydney	Cumberland
Nepean Blue Mountains	Lithgow
Hunter New England	Tamworth, Cessnock, Glenn Innes Severn, Moree Plains, Narrabri, Tenterfield
Mid North Coast	Kempsey, Nambucca
Northern	Kyogle, Richmond Valley
Western	Bogan, Bourke, Brewarrina, Coonamble, Cowra, Gilgandra, Narromine, Walgett, Warren Warrumbungle
Far West	Broken Hill, Central Darling
Murrumbidgee	Hay, Junee, Snowy Valleys
9 LHDs	28 LGAs – 10,000 children

Every child born in 28 NSW LGAs enrolled

Partnerships within 10 Alliance of Western Councils - NSW



Enrollment in most AWC locations has exceeded expectations

Local Government Area	Approx. Birth rate	No. of children currently enrolled (over 18 months)	
Bogan (*)	35	26	Since Jan 2023
Bourke (*)	35	56	
Brewarrina (*)	15	29	
Central Darling (*)	25	16	
Cobar	65	N/A	
Coonamble (*)	70	126	
Dubbo Regional	810	N/A	
Gilgandra (*)	60	80	
Mid-Western	310	N/A	
Narromine (*)	80	134	
Walgett (*)	85	102	
Warren (*)	30	0	Commencing Sept 2023
Warrumbungle (*)	100	120	

(*) 10 LGAs – 689 children



Narromine launch – first Imagination Library book and an invitation to Baby Rhyme Time at the Library

Feedback from community partners

Early Childhood Literacy Officer/Certified Speech Pathologist Central Northern Regional Library

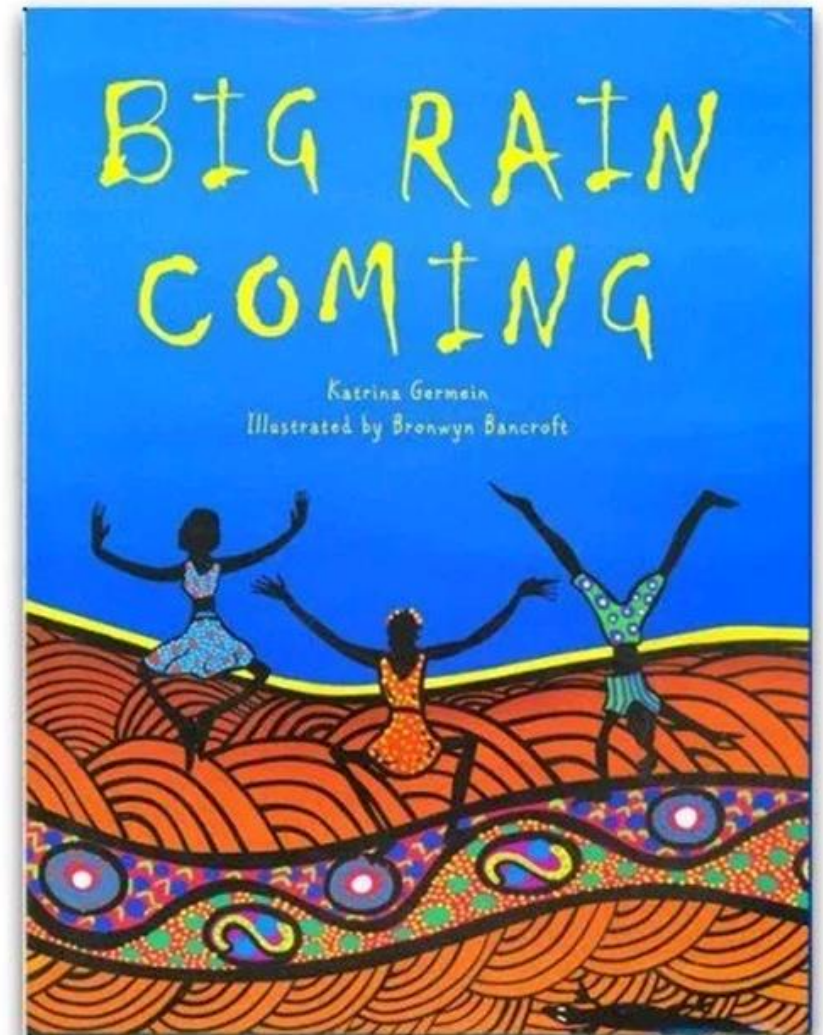
'An Imagination Library is preparation for education, making reading a habit for children from birth.'

The program encourages parents and carers to be their child's first and most important teacher, using books and tools provided to turn story time into educational building blocks.'



Feedback from families

- *“Being an indigenous family, we live in an area where a lot of kids might not go to the library, the parents don’t go to the library either, but the books still turn up and the child has access to books and the opportunity to grow and be a bit better through the books”.*



Feedback from families

- *“Dad is dyslexic. Reads the books to our daughter to improve his own reading.*
- *She loves receiving the books so much so that the postie will deliver the books to give to her personally because she loves to see her reaction when she gets a new book!*
- *Our daughter will take the book with her everywhere and always asks people to read to her.*
- *She is often sick (current testing may indicate an immune disease TBC) but cannot always attend kindergarten. Most of her books come from the Imagination Library and spends much of her time reading books.”*



Partnerships with Councils and Local Health Districts – working model

‘Whole of Community’ approach – every child born and residing in LGA eligible to have access to program

United Way Australia	Council	NSW Health
Runs the program	Connects the community	Enrolls children on the program

Partnerships with Councils and Local Health Districts – working model

United Way Australia	Council	NSW Health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select and secure books • Package and send books • Develop family resource “tip sheets”, which are included with each book • Survey families to capture impact • Oversee and manage the Imagination Library database • Train local coordinators to use the database 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote program in local Community • Nominate a local contact person who will liaise with local Health staff and enroll children on the Imagination Library database system • Facilitate related activities if desired e.g., story-time groups • Drive local awareness within community (e.g., via Libraries) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide enrolment form at earliest possible point from birth, either at hospital or first Blue Book appointment with the Early Childhood Nurse • Provide the family with the child’s first gift of a book

Program funding models

Current Operating Models

- **100%** NSW Government funded
(Bourke, Brewarrina, Central Darling, Coonamble, Gilgandra, Narromine, Warrumbungle,, Walgett)
- **100%** Local Council funded
(Bogan, Warren)
- **100%** Local Community funded
(e.g. Ryde)
- **Hybrid** (50% – 45%- 5%) Local Council – Local Community Partnership – Philanthropy/UWA
(e.g. Tamworth)

Aspirational Operating Model

- **Hybrid** (70% – 15% - 15%) NSW Government - Local Council /Community Partnership – Philanthropy

Local Councils are well positioned to build capacity and act as a local anchor for place-based initiatives such as the Imagination Library.



Program costs	
Book per month	\$9
1 Child for 1 year	\$108

\$9 per child/month for new book and parent tip sheet, inclusive of postage

“it takes a village to raise a child”



Local Councils are well positioned to build capacity and act as a local anchor for place-based initiatives such as the Imagination Library.

Proposed approach for all currently Government funded locations:

- No newborns eligible from July 2024 under Government funding
- Existing children enrolled – covered by Government funding for additional 2 years (or until they turn 5)
- A 50:50 co-contribution funding model is proposed for long term sustainability of the program
- Partnership between council and local business, community organisations and residents, supported by United Way Australia and philanthropy
- Existing enrolment process maintained with Local Health District and Library network – remains unchanged
- Approx 50 to 70% of total annual funds required during 2024/25 to continue enrolling newborns from 1 July, as births phased throughout proceeding 12 months



“it takes a village to raise a child”

Local Councils are well positioned to build capacity and act as a local anchor for place-based initiatives such as the Imagination Library.

Proposed approach for non-Government funded locations:

- United Way can assist with developing business case for council consideration
- A 50:50 co-contribution funding model is proposed for the program
- Partnership between council and local business, community organisations and community, supported by United Way Australia and philanthropy
- In some instances, the existing enrolment process within the Region, working with Local Health District and Library network can support the enrolment process
- Some new local relationships with LHD will need to be established
- Approx 50 to 70% of total annual funds required during 2024/25 to continue enrolling newborns from 1 July, as births phased throughout proceeding 12 months



“it takes a village to raise a child”

Our children - Ready for School

Together, we can ensure all children
read, learn and succeed.

**The Imagination Library not only
sparks joy and imagination,
it fires the skills that are critical for
children to start school ready to fly.**





Questions?



Thank you



**Thank you for your
support**

Additional Information

United Way Australia



BELIEF

A child's chance of success should not be limited by their postcode.



VISION

Together, we can ensure *all* Australian children **READ, LEARN and SUCCEED.**



PURPOSE

United Way Australia prepares children to succeed.

We bring together all who can make a difference, starting with local communities.



OUR ASPIRATIONAL GOAL

Over five years we will help 40,000 Australian children and young people to **READ, LEARN and SUCCEED.**

READ, LEARN AND SUCCEED.



Dollywood Foundation

Dolly's vision is to create a lifelong love of reading, prepare children for school and inspire them to dream.

Since launching in 1995, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library has become the premier early childhood book gifting program in the world by mailing over 200 million free books in Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and the United States. Currently, the program mails more than two million specially selected, age-appropriate books monthly to registered children from birth to age five.





For more information please contact:

Leo Krikmann

**Dolly Parton's Imagination Library National Program
Manager**

leo.krikmann@unitedway.com.au

Mobile: 0413 878 018

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Impact Assessment

October 2022

United Way Australia engaged dandolopartners to assess the impact and value of Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library based on available information.

Background

United Way Australia (UWA) has been delivering Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library (the Imagination Library) in Australia since 2014. Today, the Imagination Library is operating in over 400 locations around Australia.

Building off the program’s success, UWA is exploring options to expand the program to reach more children. It is also considering options to deepen engagement with children and families by embedding a ‘wraparound’ approach in more locations; and launching a new information portal for parents and educators. UWA wanted to (a) understand the current impact and value of the Imagination Library; and (b) understand the implications of these proposed shifts in program direction.

Scope of the project

UWA engaged dandolopartners to undertake an Impact Assessment of Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library in Australia. The purpose of the Impact Assessment was to draw reasonable conclusions about the effectiveness, impacts and value of the program in Australia, based on available evidence. **Unlike an evaluation, in which the evaluator seeks to gather substantial new information, dandolo conducted this impact assessment on the basis of existing information.**

As part of this Impact Assessment, UWA asked dandolo to deliver the following:

- Analysis on the effectiveness and impact of the program, in light of available evidence,
- A calculation of the return on investment of the program, and
- Consideration of proposed future program directions.

This Impact Assessment provides the results of this analysis.

This Impact Assessment delivers analysis on effectiveness and impact, estimated return on investment, and consideration of future program directions.

Section	Page
Introduction	1
Findings on a page	2
The program	3
Results and Findings	7
Return on Investment	15
Future program directions	18
Appendices	22

Findings on a page

Our Impact Assessment found that the Imagination Library is backed by robust peer-reviewed research and Australian program evidence, and likely delivers a strong return on investment.



Shared book reading helps children develop early literacy skills, resulting in improved Year 3 NAPLAN scores



The Imagination Library has a unique offering, and a track record of impact in Australia



There is a robust body of peer-reviewed research evidence showing that the Imagination Library improves shared reading behaviour and strengthens early literacy skills



Program evidence shows that the Imagination Library is also delivering strong results in Australia



It also suggests that the benefits of the program go beyond shared book reading and early literacy, and include strengthened connections within and between families and the broader community

1 / 20

Economic analysis suggests that the program breaks even on its original investment if around one in twenty families start reading to their child 6-7 days per week as a result of the program






The program

The importance of shared book-reading

Shared book-reading helps children develop critical early literacy skills.

Shared book-reading – that is, the act of a caregiver reading a book together with a child – is a well-known strategy for building children’s early cognitive development.

Shared-book reading is associated with improvements in:¹

 Brain development	 Social-emotional skills	 Parent-child relationships
 Oral language skills	 Concepts of print	 Vocabulary development
 Phonologic knowledge	 Future reading proficiency	 Future maths performance

Key factors for shared book reading are:

- ✓ **Frequency and duration:** children who are read to daily for at least 10 minutes have better literacy outcomes²
- ✓ **Quality:** strategies such as dialogic reading and print referencing have greater benefit than engaging the child as a passive listener³
- ✓ **Starting early:** babies have been found to benefit from the practice from as young as 8 months old⁴

But some children miss out on shared book-reading and its benefits.

16% of children aged 0-2 are not regularly read to or told stories by their parents⁵

1 / 4 children aged 0-2 are read to or told stories by their parents 3 times a week or less⁶

Low levels of shared book reading are associated with:

-  Lower socio-economic status⁷
-  Language other than English spoken at home⁸
-  Families with 3 or more siblings in the home⁹
-  Children with poorer levels of behavioural self-regulation (low task persistence and high emotional reactivity)¹⁰
-  Single parent households¹¹

These children start school behind, and are unlikely to catch up.

Children’s educational trajectories are established long before their first day of school because:

85-90% of brain development happens in the first 5 years of a child’s life.¹²



There is an ‘upward spiral of causality’ – children more proficient in early literacy skills read more and due to increased book exposure their reading skills improve every year.¹³

Children that miss out on developing these critical early skills are unlikely to catch up:



Children whose parents read to them less frequently at 2-3 years old had Year 3 NAPLAN reading scores 26 points lower than children whose parents read to them every day – which equates to an additional 20 weeks of schooling.¹⁴



88% of children who start school with developmental vulnerabilities are still behind by Year 3, and much more likely to be in the bottom 20% in NAPLAN all through school.¹⁵



If a child is in the bottom 20% in NAPLAN in Year 9, they only have a 9% chance of getting an ATAR high enough for university entry.¹⁶

Note: For full citations, see Appendix 3: List of sources

1 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020

2 Ibid; Yu and Daraganova, 2014

3 Shoghi et al, 2013

4 Dickinson et al, 2012; AIHW, 2020

5 ABS, 2017

6 Ibid

7 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020

8 Ibid

9 Hayes and Berthelson, 2020

10 Ibid

11 Yu and Daraganova, 2014

12 Pascoe and Brennan, 2017

13 Mol and Bus, 2011

14 Yu and Daraganova, 2014

15 Pascoe and Brennan, 2017; Brinkman, 2014; Hough and Justman,

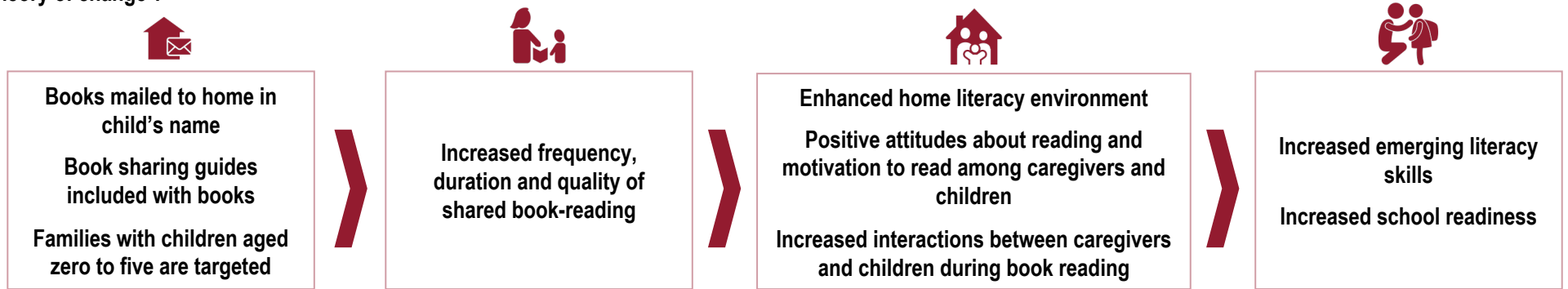
2014; Tayler et al, 2020

16 Ibid





How the Imagination Library works

The Imagination Library is a free book-gifting program aiming to build literacy readiness before children start school.

Theory of change*:



Key features:

- **Starts from age 0**
Eligible children can be enrolled from the day they are born, maximising a child's learning potential.
- **Free for participants**
The program runs at no cost to eligible families, ensuring those experiencing disadvantage benefit.
- **Low barrier to entry**
Once a family opts in, books are posted monthly to the home with no additional collection required.
- **Operates in the home**
Books are mailed to houses and addressed to the children, developing a strong home literacy environment.
- **Regular book delivery**
DPIIL sends a new book to participating families each month, growing a child's at-home library.
- **Books are kept and collected**
This allows children to grow their home library and enhance their home learning environment.
- **Reading guidance provided**
Caregivers are provided with a tip sheet to help them better engage with their child during reading.

The Imagination Library has a unique offering. As part of this project, dandolo identified and analysed a number of other book gifting programs operating around Australia. Our analysis did not identify any other book gifting program that delivers all seven of the key features offered by the Imagination Library.

*For detailed Imagination Library Logic Model, see Appendix 1.

The Imagination Library in Australia

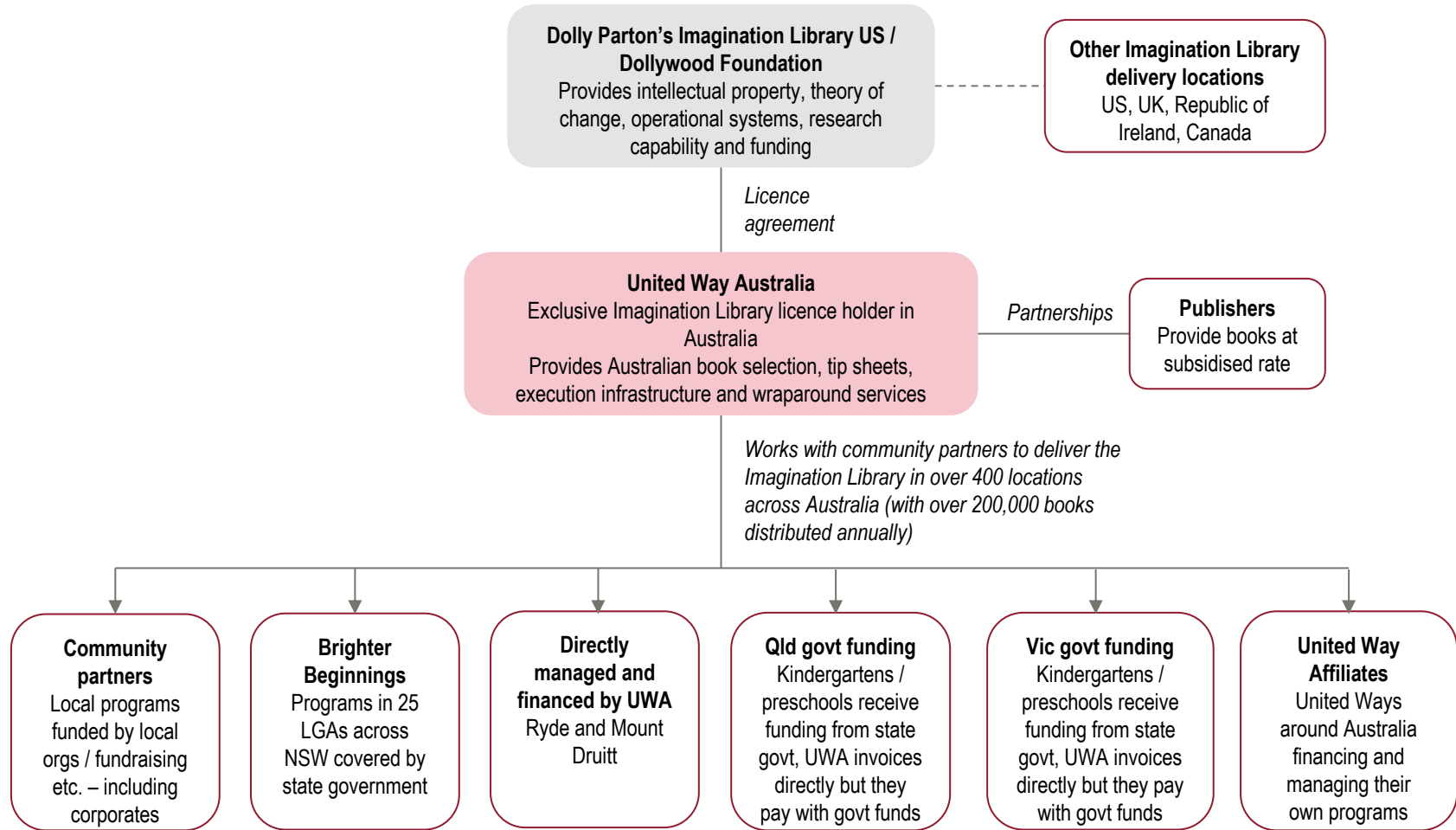
The program's infrastructure combines the institutional backing of a global program, combined with a flexible approach that enables the program to be tailored and adapted to meet the needs of particular communities in Australia.

The Imagination Library...

Has the institutional backing of a global program and operates at scale

Is delivered by an experienced Australian partner that has tailored the program to the Australian context

Leverages trusted local relationships to deliver and adapt the program to the needs of particular communities

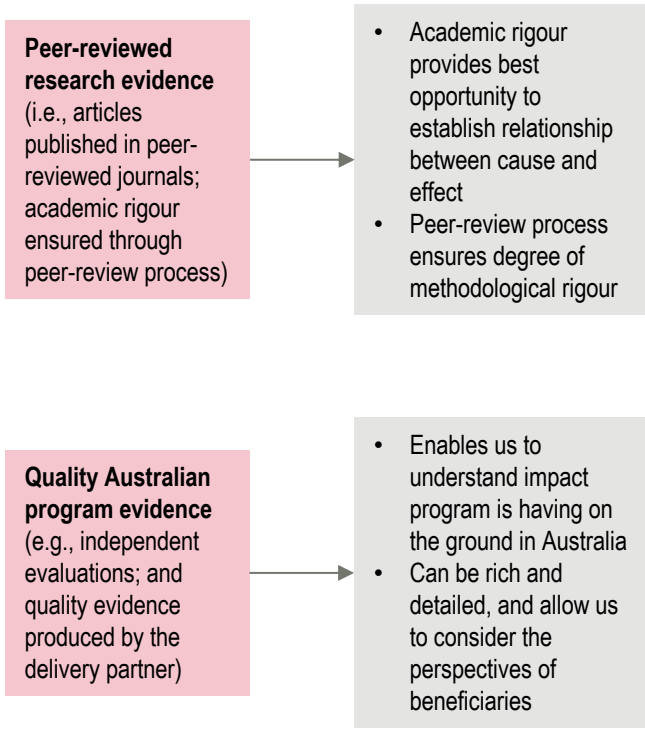


Results and findings

Impact assessment framework

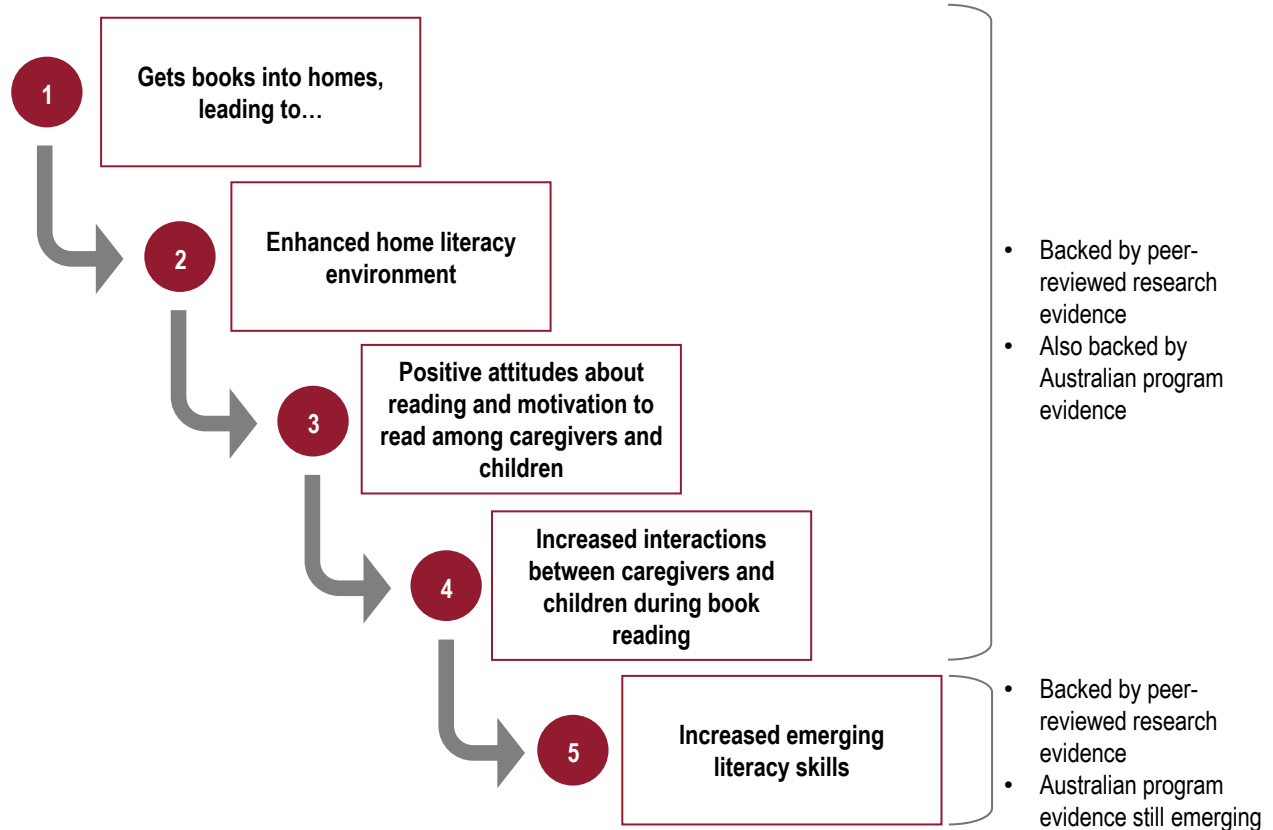
We considered two categories of evidence as part of our Impact Assessment: peer-reviewed research evidence; and Australian program evidence.

Our Impact Assessment considered two general categories of evidence:[^]



We conclude that there is robust peer-reviewed research evidence showing that the program contributes to all 5 steps of the Imagination Library’s Theory of Change;^{*} as well as Australian program evidence showing that the Imagination Library contributes to steps 1-4.

The Imagination Library...



^{*}This is a simplified version of Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library Theory of Change. The full Logic Model is available at Appendix 1.

[^] For information on how we have defined categories of evidence under this project, please see Hierarchy of Evidence at Appendix 2.

1. Getting books into homes

The Imagination Library selects quality, age- and culturally appropriate books.

In Australia, books are chosen by a Book Selection Committee made up of children's education experts, including librarians, academics and publishers. The books are:

- ✓ High quality
- ✓ Age appropriate and culturally appropriate (e.g., many iconic Australian authors and stories)
- ✓ Majority of books are locally procured

97% of caregivers surveyed in an Incus Group evaluation of the impact of the Imagination Library program for children in out of home care in Victoria said their children enjoyed the books

93% of caregivers surveyed in the Incus Group study felt books were age appropriate

'I strongly believe it is the program and the beautiful quality books that have helped mould Charlotte's interest in reading' – *Parent, Tamworth NSW*

'It is important for a child to be able to link their own lives to a story... that is available through DPIL as a lot of the stories are Aboriginal and the children can link to it'
– *Principal, Tamworth*

Books are sent to the home for free, in the child's name, for the child to keep.

Research and program evidence demonstrate numerous benefits flowing from the design of the program. These include:



Having the book arrive in the mail free of charge lowers the barrier to entry for families with low resources or without easy access to a library.¹



Children get excited when the books arrive and feel special because the book is addressed to them.²



Being able to keep the books enables children to 'build their own library before entering school', and benefit from repeated readings of the same book.³



The program builds pride in book ownership, and children value the books as their own possessions.⁴



For families with limited resources, Imagination Library books often constitute a significant proportion of total books in the home.⁵

'The findings... show that DPIL books delivered to the home hold a place of importance for the family and that pride in the books may actually be representing the importance families and children are placing on literacy and reading'.⁶

Packs include a book-sharing guide 'tip sheet' to get the most out of the book.

'The tip sheets have completely changed how I interact with the books and my children before, during and after reading.' – *Parent, Ryde NSW*

'Parents say it creates so much more conversation and it's great for engagement with kids.' – *Partner agency, VIC*

Tip sheets provide advice, techniques and ideas for engaging the child before, during and after reading, in line with strategies known to be beneficial for language acquisition and development.* Tip sheets are developed to be specific to each book.

To enable engagement with families that do not have English as their first language, tip sheets for some books have been translated into nine community languages and made available online.

88% of caregivers surveyed in the Bendigo Reads study reported that using the tip sheets increased their confidence with regard to reading

72% of caregivers surveyed in the Incus Group study said the tip sheets were 'very useful' or 'somewhat useful'

* For information on the type of techniques encouraged through the tip sheets, see page 12.

1 Incus Group, 2018

2 Ibid

3 Tamworth stakeholder interviews, 2022

4 Incus Group, 2018

5 La Trobe, 2008

6 Neyer, 2018

7 La Trobe, 2008

2. Enhanced home literacy environment

The Imagination Library enhances the home literacy environment by increasing the frequency of caregiver-child book reading.

Numerous international research studies have found the program leads to increased reading frequency:



Parents participating in the Imagination Library program read to their children more frequently than their peers that do not participate.¹



Length of enrolment in the Imagination Library program was a significant and positive predictor of likelihood to read to one's child daily.²



Participation in the Imagination Library (and similar book-giving initiatives) helps families create traditions, routines and rituals around reading.³

This is supported by Australian program evidence:

71%

of caregivers surveyed in the Bendigo Reads study reported reading to their children more frequently as a result of the program

90%

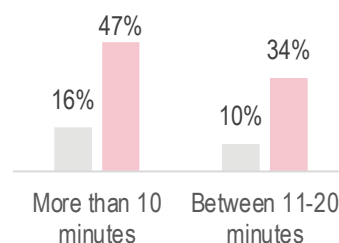
of caregivers surveyed as part of the Incus Group study reported that they are reading more often and for longer with their children as a result of the program

11%

increase in children read to once a day or more after 6 months of Imagination Library participation (from 61% to 72%) according to the UWA Impact Report 2020

The Imagination Library also increases duration of book reading and leads to earlier uptake of shared book-reading.

Participation in the Imagination Library also leads to an increase in duration of book reading:



After 6 months of participating in the Imagination Library program, the number of parents that reported reading to their child for more than 10 minutes in one session increased by 31%. The number of parents that reported reading to their child for between 11-20 minutes per session tripled.⁴

Australian evidence has shown that participation in the Imagination Library program leads to families starting to read to their child at an earlier age:



15% of caregivers surveyed in Tamworth reported before commencing the program that their child was too young to be read to, reflecting the common misconception that shared reading is for older infants and children. After six months, this had decreased to 1.6%⁵

'We explain that by reading to their baby it will build a better brain and establishing that reading is just something we do; it is engrained in the family from birth this is the norm' – *Child health nurse, Tamworth*

1 Zwierzchowska-Dod, 2022; Harvey, 2016

2 Ridzi, 2014

3 Neyer 2018; Vanobbergen 2009 [note: this study related to BookBabies, a Flemish program employing a similar model, not DPIL]

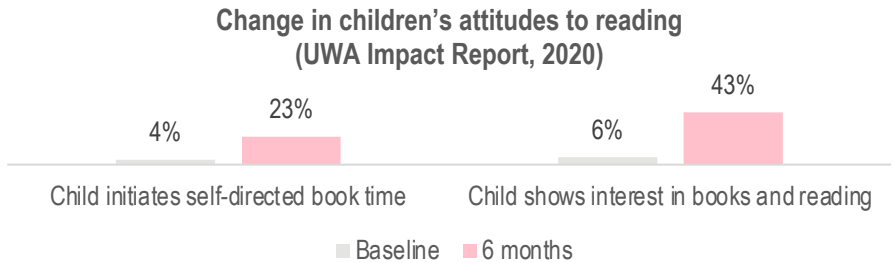
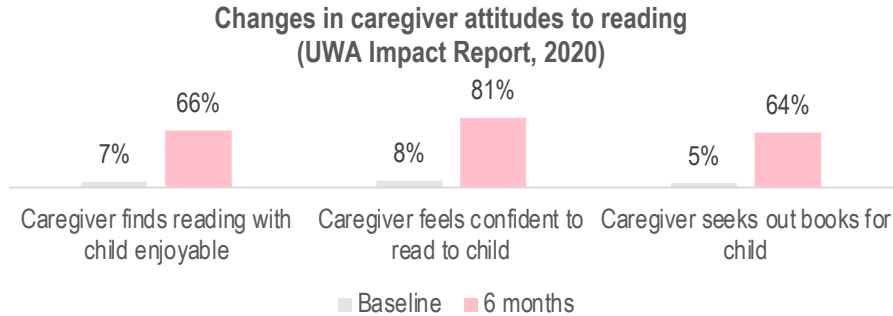
4 UWA, Impact Report, 2020

5 Ibid; UWA survey data [unpublished, provided to dandolopartners]

3. Positive attitudes about reading

Australian evidence shows significant improvements in caregiver and child attitudes toward reading. This is backed up by peer-reviewed international research.

Program results have consistently found that Imagination Library participation leads to improved attitudes about reading and motivation to read among both caregivers and children:









'Be.Bendigo's Chapter of DPIL has had a significant influence over the levels of Bendigo families' interest in reading.'
- La Trobe researchers, 2018

'The excitement that getting a new book generated created lots of requests to be read to, countering tendencies to forget due to busyness. He still requests to be read to multiple times a day now the program is finished for him.'
- Parent, UWA National Survey 2018

The Incus Group study found similar improvements: more than 80% of caregivers surveyed agreed that:

- ✓ 'I understand new ways to engage my child in reading'
- ✓ 'I want to read with my child more often'
- ✓ 'I feel more confident in my ability to read with my child'
- ✓ 'My child's requests for reading increased [as a result of the program]'

International studies have found links between Imagination Library participation and:

-  Interest in reading among children.¹
-  Child-initiated reading.²
-  Enjoyment in reading among parents.³
-  Confidence reading among parents.⁴
-  Increased book ownership (beyond the books received from the program).⁵
-  Time spent at the library.⁶

1 Harvey, 2016 (a)
 2 Tura, 2021
 3 Zwierzchowska-Dod, 2022
 4 Ibid.
 5 Lelle 2011 [Note: Program evaluation, not peer-reviewed]
 6 Funge et al, 2017

4. Increased interaction during book reading

The Imagination Library leads to increased interaction between caregivers and children during book reading.

- Research shows that engaging children actively throughout the reading process (rather than having them engage as passive listeners) leads to improvements in skills critical for literacy development.¹
- The reading tip sheets provided alongside the books (see page 9) focus on teaching caregivers techniques to improve extra-textual talk, such as:
 - Asking children questions about the text
 - Describing / discussing / counting images or objects
 - Repeating / teaching letter sounds and rhyming words

Peer-reviewed research evidence has repeatedly found a link between participation in the Imagination Library program and interactions while reading:



Length of enrolment in the program positively correlates with an increase in parents talking about the story and asking their child questions about the story.²



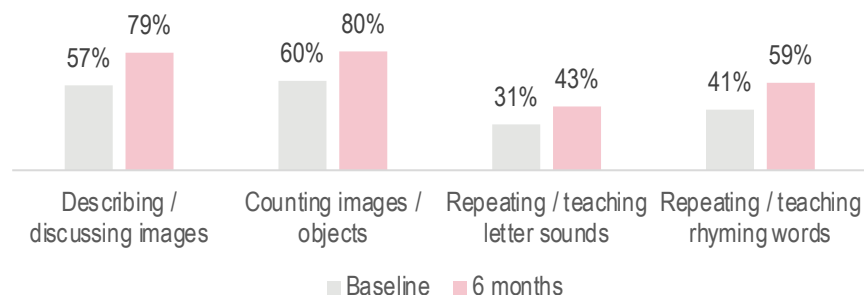
Imagination Library participants have increased book interactions compared to non-participants (including asking children about the pictures in the book, and talking about what is happening in the story).³



A study of book sharing behaviours of Imagination Library participants found that parents were likely to hold their child close while book sharing; to read all of the words or point out all of the pictures; and to use different voices when reading aloud.⁴

Australian evidence shows that Imagination Library participation leads to increased interaction between caregivers and children during book reading:

Interactions between parents and children during book reading (UWA Impact Report, 2020)



'Extra-textual talk provided by parents can be especially valuable... and scaffold children's comprehension of and engagement with the text in ways that facilitate language and literacy development' – *Ridzi 2014*

'Both my grandchildren are on the program... the older grandchild is counting in the books, and they have the concepts of print with the younger one turning the page and pointing to things in the books' – *Grandparent, Tamworth*

1 Chow et al, 2008; Cameron and Pinto, 2009

2 Ridzi, 2014

3 Tura et al, 2021

4 Zweirzchowska-Dod, 2022

5. Increased emerging literacy skills

A robust body of international research evidence – including randomised control trials – shows that Imagination Library participants outperform non-participants on key indicators.

Indicators on which Imagination Library participants have been found to outperform non-participants in peer-reviewed research studies:

- ✓ Letter identification and letter knowledge¹
- ✓ Understanding of text and illustration orientation²
- ✓ Word and letter concepts within text³
- ✓ Matching sounds to symbols of print⁴
- ✓ Oral reading skills⁵
- ✓ Application of phonics rules⁶
- ✓ Performance on academic reading measures⁷
- ✓ Competency pass rates in kindergarten, Grade 1 and Grade 2⁸

Australian program evidence also points to improvements in emerging literacy skills, though research is still under development.

- 58%** of caregivers surveyed reported that their child's vocabulary had grown as a result of receiving the Imagination Library books (UWA Impact Report, 2020)
- 89%** of caregivers surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that 'The Imagination Library program has helped my child's learning and development / growth' (Incus Group)
- 93%** of caregivers surveyed indicated that their child's vocabulary had increased 'a little' or 'a lot' (Incus Group)
- 77%** of caregivers surveyed reported that their child's understand and knowledge about the world around them had increased 'a little' or 'a lot' (Incus Group)

'The impact is evident in the home, the 3-year-olds are more vocal and better at communicating with us.' – *Child Health Nurse, Tamworth*

'We thought our son might need speech therapy, but since getting the books his speech has improved.' – *Parent, Vale Grove, SA*

'The children are coming to us with book knowledge, the text is powerful... and the language development hasn't happened if they are not being read to.' – *Principal, Tamworth*

1 Waldron, 2019
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Harvey, 2016 (b)
5 Ibid.

6 Harvey, 2014
7 Zwierzchowska-Dod, 2022 [Note: This is a recent PhD and has not yet been published in a peer-reviewed journal]
8 Harvey, 2014; Harvey 2016 (b)

Beyond literacy: strengthening connections

Emerging Australian evidence shows the Imagination Library connecting children with families, preschools and communities.



Community connections

Emerging Australian program evidence indicates that the Imagination Library has been an asset for building connections between families and other services. While further research is required, such benefits appear to include:

✓ Increasing families' willingness to engage with other forms of community service delivery (Incus Group)

✓ Embedding formal linkages between early health and education programs for 0-5 year olds (Tamworth Interviews)

✓ Being used as a tool for agency workers supporting vulnerable families to facilitate positive engagement (Incus Group)



Family-preschool connections

In many Imagination Library delivery locations, early learning centres receive a copy of the same book that families receive every month.

This creates the opportunity for the books to serve as a touchpoint between the family and the early learning centre, scaffolding and reinforcing the child's formal learning.

'This program gives me so much validation that my community cares about the future of my son.'
- Parent, Tamworth



Whole-of-family connections

47% of caregivers said after six months of participating in the program that people other than the primary caregiver were reading to the child, compared to 3% in the baseline survey (UWA National Impact Report 2020)

Incus Group found that multiple members of the family use the book, and multiple members of the household benefit from the program

'Now Harriet is in preschool the kids in the classroom talk about the book'
- Ashleigh Dallas, DPIL Ambassador and parent

'It's even got my husband reading to the kids too'
- Parent, Bendigo

'The children know the same book characters... when they have reading in the centres, the children say "I love this part"'
- Tamworth council representative



Child-caregiver connections

79% of caregivers agreed or strongly agreed that 'I feel more connected to my child through reading the Imagination Library books' (Incus Group)

"When the older brother reads to the little brother it's so special"
- Parent, Tamworth

Incus Group found that increased connectedness due to shared reading can extend to siblings and strengthen whole-of-family relationships

Return on investment

Evidence for value of shared reading

We know that a modest increase in shared reading has a material impact on Year 3 NAPLAN scores.

We know that a child read to 6-7 days per week at 2-3 years of age has:



Year 3 NAPLAN reading scores 26.3 points higher on average (equivalent to 20 extra weeks of schooling in Year 3)

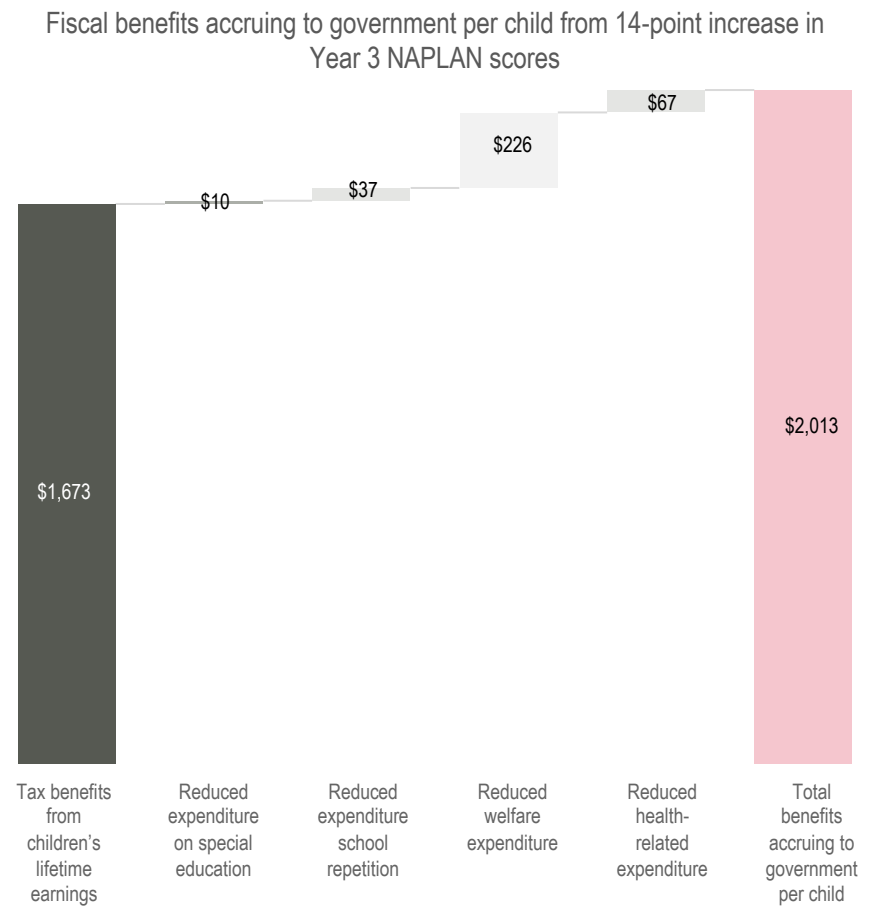


Year 3 NAPLAN numeracy scores 15.4 points higher on average (equivalent to 12 extra weeks of schooling in Year 3)

This difference in scores is in comparison to a child read to 0-5 days per week, after controlling for socio-demographic factors.¹

Note: We assume based on other research on shared reading that other changes in reading behaviour would also result in improvements to NAPLAN scores (for example, if a child went from being read to 0 times a week to 3 times a week; or if a child's engagement in shared reading doubled in duration). However, the research is not presented with sufficient granularity to confirm the impact of other changes on Year 3 NAPLAN scores.

Previous analysis suggests that the monetary benefit to government of a 14-point increase in Year 3 NAPLAN scores is around \$2,000 per student.^{2*^}



¹ Yu and Daraganova, 2014 (which draws from data from the *Longitudinal Study of Australian Children*).

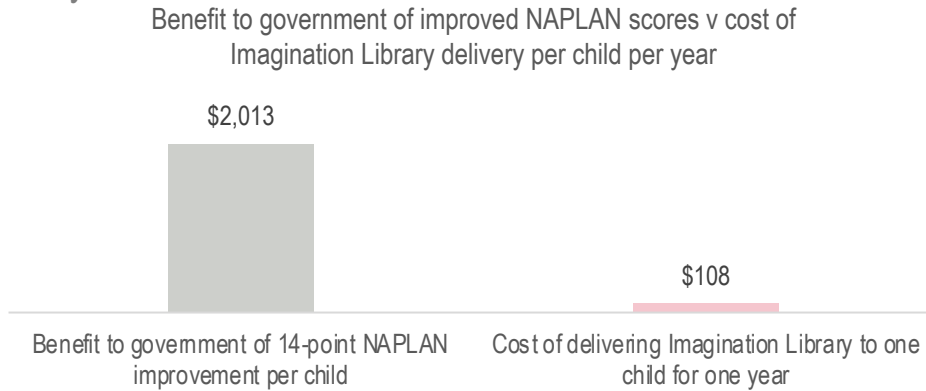
² PWC, 2019; Australian Productivity Commission, 2019

* We based our analysis on a 14-point increase in Year 3 NAPLAN scores (combined literacy and numeracy) because this was the effect size used in the previous analysis on which we relied (PWC analysis on the monetary value of one year of early learning attendance). According to Yu and Daraganova 2014, the impact of shared reading on Year 3 NAPLAN scores is higher than 14 points, meaning our analysis is inherently conservative. For more information on our methodology, see Appendix 4.

^ 'Government' here includes both Federal and State / Territory Governments.

Return on Investment for Imagination Library

For the program to break even, we estimate that around one in every twenty participating families would need to start reading to their child 6-7 times per week as a result of the Imagination Library.[^]



Data indicates that the program actually leads to one in five families reading to their child 6-7 times per week – meaning it potentially offers a four-for-one return on investment.

UWA survey data collected in 2020 shows that **22% of families started reading to their child 6-7 days per week** after 12 months of participation in the Imagination Library program.¹

This would mean that the program offers a **four-for-one return on investment**.

Given our intentionally conservative approach, there is reason to believe the actual return on investment for government is even higher than that.

Our methodology is intentionally conservative:

- Our analysis calculates the return on investment **on average across the Australian population**. Because the Imagination Library program presently focuses on lower socio-economic communities, the program is likely more cost effective than a program delivered on a whole-of-population basis (for more, see page 19).
- Research shows **shared book reading has a greater impact on Year 3 NAPLAN scores** than the effect size used in the economic analysis we relied on (which was based on a 14-point improvement in NAPLAN scores from one year of early learning).
- Because of data limitations, our analysis only captures a **subset of the monetisable benefits that flow from the Imagination Library**. Benefits not captured include those that accrue to other stakeholders (e.g., employers; children and families); or that did not rely on Year 3 NAPLAN results (e.g., most benefits flowing from reduced expenditure on health and crime); and benefits of the program not directly related to improved literacy and numeracy (such as connecting vulnerable families to other services through wraparound support; parent engagement in children's learning; increasing children's engagement with non-primary caregivers).
- The research we have on the impacts of shared book reading only compares children read to 0-5 times per week with children read to 6-7 times per week. There are likely also **monetisable benefits from other types of improvements** (for example, a child being read to 3 times per week instead of 0 times per week; increased duration of book reading) – however, research is not yet sufficiently granular to confirm this so these could not be included in our analysis.

* We use the same standard for reading frequency here as Yu & Daraganova, 2014 (6-7 days per week).

[^] The cost of delivery based on program documentation provided by United Way Australia is \$9 per book per child x 12 books per year = \$108 per child per year. We calculated ROI on the basis of cost of delivery for one year because we consider this to be a reasonable approximation of the 'dosage' of Imagination Library required to achieve a change in shared reading activities (given most Australian evidence on the impact of the Imagination Library compares families at commencement of the program; and after 6 months of participation).

¹ UWA survey data, 2020 [unpublished, provided to dandolopartners]

Future program directions

Adopting a universal approach

UWA asked us to consider the benefits of adopting a universal approach to delivering the Imagination Library. A universal approach would deliver benefits to more children, but at a significantly higher cost.

What does the approach involve?



A **universal approach** involves rolling a program out across the general population, without attempting to tailor it to the beneficiaries that need the services the most.



This differs from **targeted approaches**, which aim to deliver programs directly to particular groups of beneficiaries (for example, those in lower socio-economic areas).

Universal approaches have been adopted in other Imagination Library locations (for example, in a number of US states including Tennessee, the program is rolled out to every child).

In Australia, the Imagination Library is generally targeted by geographic area (but delivered to all children within a specific area).

Potential benefits of the proposed approach:

- ✓ Even families that already practice shared reading and have books in the home stand to benefit from:
 - Increased awareness that shared book reading should start as early as possible (i.e., including newborns);
 - Increased frequency, duration and quality of reading;
 - Increased frequency of non-primary caregivers and other adults reading to the child; and
 - Strengthened connections with the community and other services, such as health and early learning.
- ✓ In a universal approach, the overall cost per child of delivering the program reduces due to economies of scale.
- ✓ When programs are targeted at the community level, individuals who need the program but do not live within the targeted community can miss out (for example, lower socio-economic families that happen to live in wealthier postcodes).
- ✓ Universal programs can reduce the stigma associated with receiving a 'handout'.
- ✓ Universal programs can make a broader contribution to lifting literacy and numeracy standards – which is essential for Australia's future economic prosperity.
- ✓ Even in a universal program, research is clear that the children that need the program the most will derive the greatest benefit. As such, even universal programs can serve as an equaliser.

Potential risks / downsides to the proposed approach:

- Where the program is delivered universally, UWA will inevitably be delivering some services to families that already have best practice for shared reading, and will not derive as much value from the program.

UWA asked us to consider the benefits of deepening and further embedding the wraparound approach – currently in use in Tamworth, Ryde and Mount Druitt – more broadly. While more expensive, the program has the potential to create significant benefits for vulnerable families.

What does the approach involve?

A wraparound approach is a 'structured means by which coordinated service is provided to individuals with complex needs'.¹

For the Imagination Library program, taking a wraparound approach – as is currently in place in Tamworth, Ryde and Mount Druitt – involves the following key features:

Guiding principle

United Way is connector / facilitator



What it looks like in practice

UWA coordinates multiple partners in a particular community

Imagination Library acts as a catalyst for family bonding and shared reading



Imagination Library is a springboard for related initiatives and used in community literacy programming, deepening the program's impact (e.g., library activities; playgroups; speech pathology)

Community stakeholders design enrolment methods



Identify suitable entry points (e.g., in Tamworth, enrolment is done during initial infant hearing tests)

Based on need, community groups provide additional wrap-around services



Through outreach activities, vulnerable families are identified for referral to more intensive services (e.g., immunisation clinics and other health services, community playgroups)

Multiple funders engaged to ensure sustainability



Can include government entities; corporates; community organisations working together to ensure sustainability of funding

Local partners take ownership and drive outcomes



Program is owned by the local community, who are able to adapt in line with their needs

Potential benefits of the proposed approach:

- ✓ Creates a soft entry point for vulnerable families to connect with services for holistic, integrated support
 - Enabling service delivery organisations to better engage with vulnerable families creates significant spillover benefits (e.g., from enabling delivery of other services such as health)
- ✓ Builds connections and capability across community services, local government, business and families, enabling service delivery to be carried out more efficiently
- ✓ Enables gaps in service delivery to be identified in a way that takes the real needs of communities into account
- ✓ Engagement of multiple partners and funders strengthens program sustainability

Potential risks / downsides to the proposed approach:

- Because they involve numerous stakeholders, wraparound approaches delivered in collaboration require experienced delivery partners and careful management (for example, with regard to shared responsibilities; and monitoring and evaluation).

¹ Gonski Institute for Education, 2020

UWA asked us to consider the potential effectiveness of developing a portal for parents and educators. The approach has potential benefits, though there is a risk it may not be widely used.

What does the approach involve?

To augment existing Imagination Library activities, UWA is planning to develop an online portal for parents and educators. The portal will contain resources for parents – developed in partnership with subject matter experts – that share knowledge and activities, and provide gentle encouragement to read regularly. Resources for parents would include:



Articles, videos and tip sheets on topics of interest to parents, such as choosing books for a child based on their age, and using different languages to read picture books



Demonstration storytime videos using Imagination Library books, which guide families through the story, to illustrate reading techniques and build parents' confidence with reading



Tip sheets for a subset of Imagination Library books translated into common community languages

In addition, an online partner hub will provide access to resources designed for those implementing the program, such as kindergarten services, playgroups and libraries. These resources will focus on information sharing among organisations, best practice in early literacy, and capacity building for staff.

A monthly email sent to participating early learning services will provide details of the month's book, the accompanying tip sheet, book-related activity ideas and a related resource designed to build capacity.

Potential benefits of the proposed approach:

- ✓ Providing additional resources about Imagination Library books to parents and educators has the potential to strengthen the connection between families and early learning services and reinforce the benefits of formal learning at home
- ✓ Making translated versions of tip sheets available could strengthen program effectiveness for families that do not speak English as their first language – a group associated with lower levels of shared reading
- ✓ The online partner hub could support the deepening of the wraparound approach (see page 20), building connections between families and other services and strengthening connections with community
- ✓ It is a relatively low-cost intervention that, if used as intended, could reinforce the success of the overall program
- ✓ The online partner hub could result in broader spillover benefits, such as improved collaboration among partner organisations

Potential risks / downsides to the proposed approach:

- There is already a significant amount of information and guidance online for parents on reading and literacy, which may reduce the portal's impact and create a risk of duplication
- Digital literacy is likely mixed among low socio-economic groups
- The level of demand for the portal among parents and educators is unclear, so hard to assess how much the portal would be used

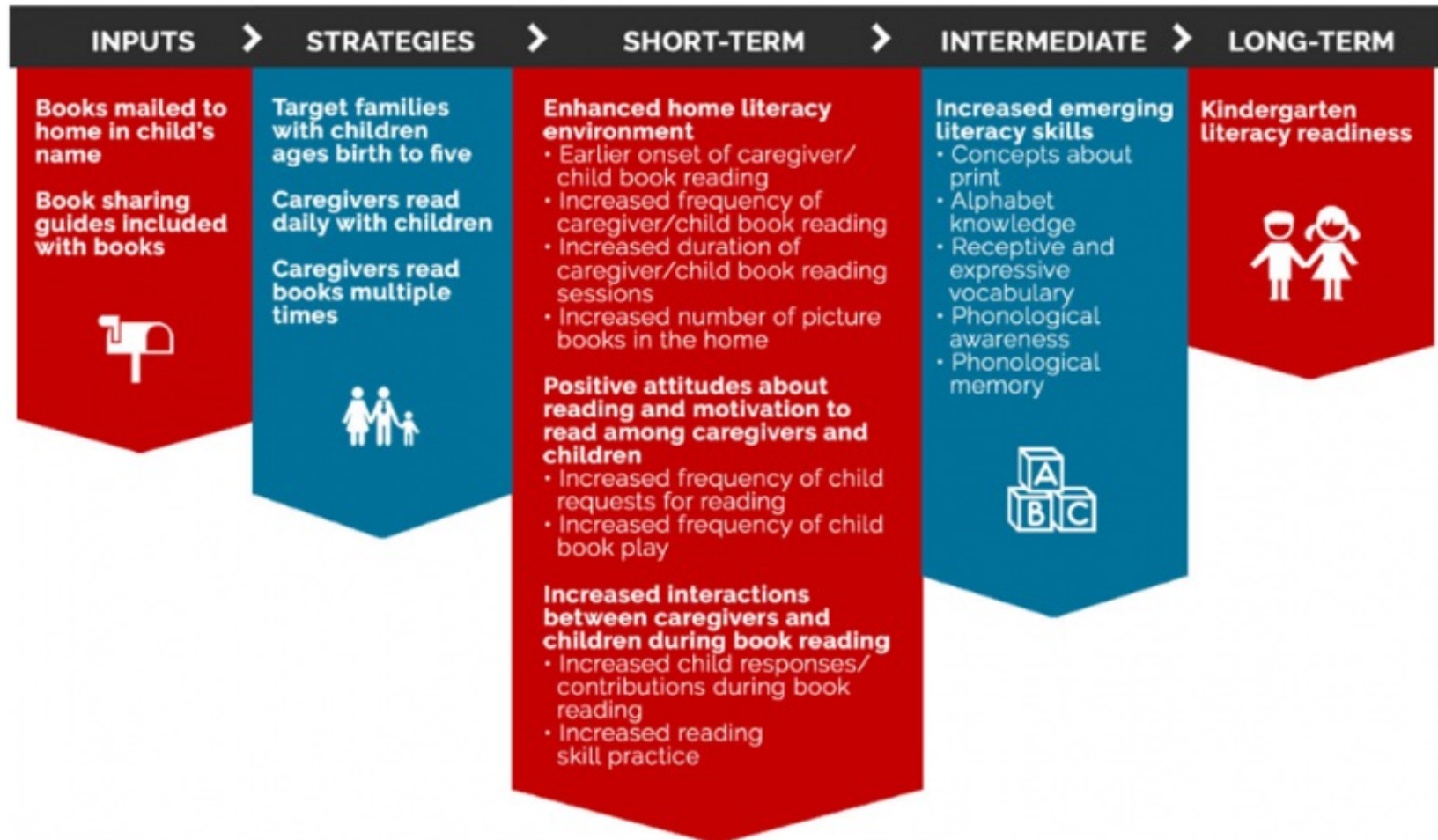
Appendices

Appendix 1: Imagination Library Logic Model

Formal version of Imagination Library Logic Model provided by Dollywood Foundation and used in Australia and internationally.

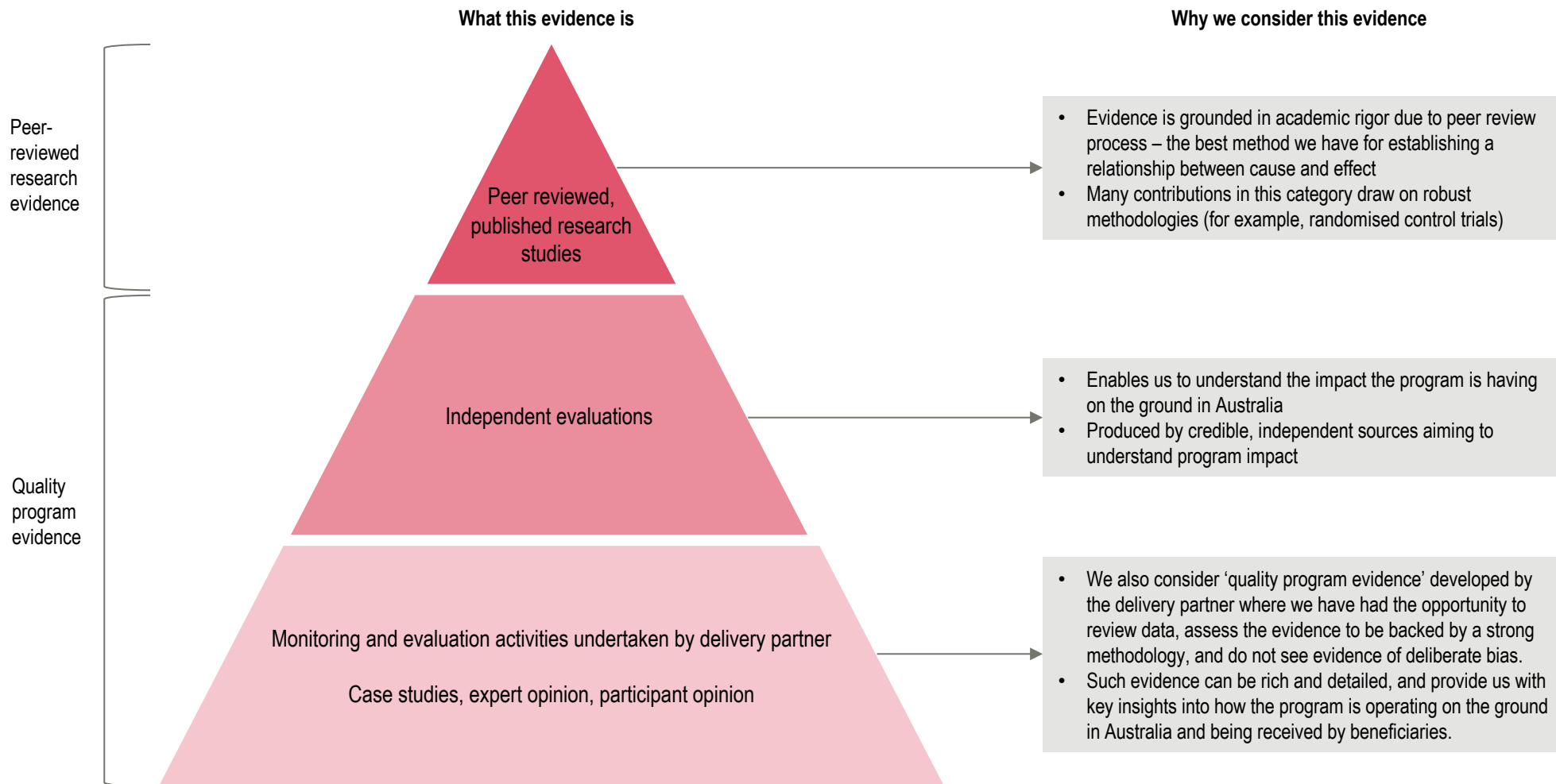
Logic Model

Based on Imagination Library Research Findings and Literature Review



Appendix 2: Hierarchy of evidence

There is a body of peer-reviewed research evidence about the Imagination Library program, especially from international sources. Australian program evidence confirms these international findings.



Hierarchies of evidence are commonly used to assess available information (see for example Guyatt and Sackett, 1995). We have developed this streamlined version for the current project.

Appendix 3: List of Sources

Peer-reviewed research evidence on the Imagination Library

Authors	Title	Publication	Year	Country
Ann Harvey	Imagination Library: A Study of the Sustained Effects of Participation in an Early Reading Program	The Dela Kappa Gamma Bulletin: International Journal for Professional Educators	2014	USA
Ann Harvey	Improving Family Literacy Practices	Sage Open	2016 (a)	USA
Ann Harvey	Sustained Effects of Participation in Imagination Library	READ: an online journal for literary educators	2016 (b)	USA
Funge et al	Promoting Positive Family Interactions: Evaluating a Free Early Childhood Book Distribution Program	Early Childhood Education Journal	2017	USA
Neyer et al	Beyond the Numbers: social and emotional benefits of participation in the Imagination Library home-based literary programme	Journal of Early Childhood Literacy	2018	USA
Ridzi et al	From Read Ahead to Literacy Coalition: the Leadership Role of the Central New York Community Foundation in the Creation of a Local Institution	Community Literacy Journal	2011	USA
Ridzi et al	The Imagination Library Program: Increasing Parental Reading Through Book Distribution	Reading Psychology	2014	USA
Ridzi et al	The Imagination Library and Kindergarten Readiness: Evaluating the Impact of Monthly Book Distribution	Journal of Applied Social Science	2017	USA
Samiei et al	Examining the Association Between the Imagination Library Early Childhood Literary Program and Kindergarten Readiness	Reading Psychology	2016	USA
Singh et al	Exploring the Literacy Practices of Refugee Families Enrolled in a Book Distribution Program and an Intergenerational Family Literacy Program	Early Childhood Education Journal	2013	USA
Tura et al	Evaluating the Impact of Book Gifting on the Reading Behaviors of Parents and Young Children	Early Years	2021	UK
Waldron	“Dream More, Learn More, Care More, and Be More”: The Imagination Library influencing Storybook Reading and Early Literacy	Reading Psychology	2019	USA
Zwierzchowska-Dod	Books, Babies and Bonding: the Impact of Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library on parental engagement in book-sharing and on child development from 0-5 years old	Swansea University <i>[Please note: This is a recently released PhD and has not yet been through the peer-review process]</i>	2022	UK

Appendix 3: List of Sources

Australian Program Evidence

Authors	Title	Publication	Year	Country
Johnson et al	Bendigo Reads – Imagination Library	La Trobe University	2018	AUS
The Incus Group	Evaluation of the Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library For Children in Out of Home Care & Placement Prevention in Victoria	The Ian Potter Foundation	2018	AUS
United Way Australia	Macquarie Park Business Community Partnership	N/A	2022	AUS
United Way Australia	Early Literacy in Australia	N/A	2018	AUS
United Way Australia	The Impact of the Imagination Library on the Home Literacy Environment and associated Emerging Literacy Skills in Infants and Young Children	N/A	2020	AUS
United Way Australia	Tamworth Evaluation Report 2021	N/A	2021	AUS
United Way Australia	Transcript from interviews with Imagination Library stakeholders in Tamworth NSW <i>[collected as part of PhD research]</i>	N/A	2022	AUS
United Way Australia	Other program documentation and data made available to dandolopartners	N/A	2015–2022	AUS

Appendix 3: List of Sources

Other sources

Authors	Title	Publication	Accessed at	Year	Country
Australian Bureau of Statistics	Childhood Education and Care Australia	N/A	https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/childhood-education-and-care-australia/jun-2017/44020do001_201706.xls	2017	AUS
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Australia's Children	N/A	https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/executive-summary	2020	AUS
Australian Productivity Commission	Report on Government Services	N/A	https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2019/child-care-education-and-training/early-childhood-education-and-care/rogs-2019-partb-chapter3.pdf	2019	AUS
Brinkman	The Predictive Validity of the AEDI: Predicting later Cognitive and Behavioral Outcomes	Fraser Mustard Centre and Telethon Kids Institute	https://www.acer.org/files/Brinkman.pdf	2014	AUS
Cameron and Pinto	A Day in the Life: Secure Interludes With Joint Book Reading	Reading, Journal of Research in Childhood Education	https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F02568540909594672	2009	CAN
Chow et al	Dialogic reading and morphology training in Chinese children: Effects on language and literacy	Developmental Psychology	https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2007-19851-024	2018	Hong Kong
Dickinson et al	How Reading Books Fosters Language Development Around the World	Child Development Research	https://www.hindawi.com/journals/cdr/2012/602807/	2012	AUS
Farrant and Zubrick	Parent-child Book Reading Across Early Childhood and Child Vocabulary in the Early School Years: Findings from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children	First Language	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0142723713487617	2013	AUS
Gelfer et al	Literacy Education and Families: A program and its progress	Early Child Development and Care	https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ633425	2006	USA
Gonski Institute for Education	A Wraparound Approach to 'Whole of Student' Issues: Implementation Framework	N/A	https://www.gie.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/Wraparound%20Guidelines_final.pdf	2020	AUS
Gordon	An Analysis of the First 18 Months of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Middletown, Ohio	N/A	https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BxGQ1Z0VwA4tNmpQamxrNmg2Rjg/view?resourcekey=0-IUpXAPE-XrANF4rn4m8ydg	2010	USA

Appendix 3: List of Sources

Authors	Title	Publication	Accessed at	Year	Country
Guyatt et al	Users' guides to the medical literature. IX. A method for grading health care recommendations.	JAMA	https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/7500513/	1995	USA
Hayes and Berthelsen	Longitudinal Profiles of Shared Book Reading in Early Childhood and Children's Academic Achievement in Year 3 of School	School Effectiveness and School Improvement	https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09243453.2019.1618347?journalCode=nses20	2019	AUS
Houng and Justman	NAPLAN Scores as Predictors of Access to Higher Education in Victoria	Melbourne Institute	https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/publications/working-papers/search/result?paper=2156513	2014	AUS
Lelle, M A	Imagination Library Annual Evaluation Report: A Project of Willard Library funded by the W K Kellogg Foundation	N/A	https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BxGQ1Z0VwA4tUjJhY1ZkWTJiVXM/view?resourcekey=0-jJl9o-Y8oDs59DbKp7ZvZA	2011	USA
Li and Fleer	Family Pedagogy: Parent-child Interaction in Shared Book Reading	Early Child Development and Care	https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1082507	2015	AUS
Lorio et al	A Systematic Review of Parent-Child Shared Book Reading Interventions for Infants and Toddlers	Hammil Institute on Disabilities	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0271121421998793	2021	USA
Lelle, M A	Imagination Library Annual Evaluation Report: A Project of Willard Library	N/A	https://usa.imaginationlibrary.com/medias/file/Imagination%20Library	2011	USA
Mol and Bus	To Read or Not to Read: a Meta-analysis of Print Exposure from Infancy to Early Adulthood	Psychological Bulletin	https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21219054/	2011	USA
Pascoe and Brennan	Lifting our Game: Report of the review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools Through Early Childhood Interventions	N/A	https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/LiftingOurGame.PDF	2017	AUS
PWC	A Smart Investment for a Smarter Australia: Economic analysis of universal early childhood education in the year before school in Australia	N/A	https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/downloads/ECO%20ANALYSIS%20Full%20Report.pdf	2019	AUS
Shahaeian et al	Early Shared Reading, Socioeconomic Status, and Children's Cognitive and School Competencies: Six Years of Longitudinal Evidence	Scientific Studies of reading	https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10888438.2018.1482901?needAccess=true	2018	AUS

Appendix 3: List of Sources

Authors	Title	Publication	Accessed at	Year	Country
Shoghi et al	Let's Read Literature Review	Murdoch Children's Research Institute	https://www.letsread.com.au/About/Research/Resource/s/2013-Let-s-Read-Literature-Review	2013	AUS
Sim and Berthelsen	Shared Book Readings by Parents with Young Children: Evidence Based Practice	Australian Journal for Early Childhood	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/183693911403900107	2014	AUS
Sukhram and Hsu	Developing Reading Partnerships Between Parents and Children: a Reflection on the Reading Together Program	Early Childhood Education Journal	https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10643-011-0500-y	2012	USA
Taylor et al	Associations between clusters of early life risk factors and developmental vulnerability at age 5: a retrospective cohort study using population-wide linkage of administrative data in Tasmania, Australia	BMJ Open	https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/10/4/e033795.full.pdf	2020	AUS
Vanobbergen et al	Bookbabies, their Parents and the Library: an evaluation of a Flemish reading program in families with young children	Educational Review	https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00131910903045922?journalCode=cedr20	2009	IK
Weadman et al	The Development and Psychometric Properties of a Shared Book Reading Observational Tool: The Emergent Literacy and Language Early Childhood Checklist for Teachers	First Language	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/01427237211056735	2021	AUS
Westerveld et al	Shared Book Reading Behaviours of Parents and Their Verbal Preschoolers on the Autism Spectrum	Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders	https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32067147/	2020	AUS
Wick et al	Looking or Talking: Visual Attention and Verbal Engagement During Shared Book Reading of Preschool Children on the Autism Spectrum	Autism	https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339232714_Looking_or_talking_Visual_attention_and_verbal_engagement_during_shared_book_reading_of_preschool_children_on_the_autism_spectrum	2020	AUS
Yu and Daraganova	Children's early home learning environment and learning outcomes in the early years of school	Australian Institute of Family Studies	http://talkingtogether.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/childrens-early-home-learning-environment-and-learning-outcomes-in-the-early-years-of-school.pdf	2014	AUS

Appendix 4: ROI Methodology

Drawing from PWC analysis of the benefits of early childhood education, we calculated that the benefit to government from an average 14-point increase in Year 3 NAPLAN results across the population is \$595.74 million (equal to \$2,013 per child).¹

1

To calculate the monetary value to government of improved Year 3 NAPLAN scores, we drew from PWC analysis of the value of early childhood education. The PWC analysis assumed one year of early childhood education led to an average 14-point increase in Year 3 NAPLAN scores. Research shows that more frequent shared reading leads to a greater than 14-point increase in Year 3 NAPLAN scores.²



PWC identified \$4.74 billion in benefits associated with providing 15 hours of early childhood education in the year before school. Of these benefits, governments received \$1.96 billion; the other benefits accrued to other stakeholders (parents / carers, children, and employers).

2

However, not all categories of benefit that accrue to government as a result of early childhood education are relevant to shared book reading. We selected only the categories of benefit that (a) flow to government, rather than other stakeholders; and (b) were calculated based on a change in Year 3 NAPLAN results. This conservative calculation of total benefits to government flowing from improved Year 3 NAPLAN results = \$595.74 million.



3

We then calculated the benefit per child to the government of a 14-point increase in NAPLAN results, by taking this number and dividing it by the number of children in enrolled in a preschool program in the relevant year, 2017 (295,826 children).³



4

Based on this calculation (\$595.74 million / 295,826), we estimate that the **benefit that accrues to the government per child across the population as a result of a 14-point increase in Year 3 NAPLAN results is \$2,013 per child.**

Benefit of early childhood education	Present value (3 % discount rate) \$ million	Group affected	Calculated through NAPLAN
Parental earnings benefits	\$1,463	Parents / carers	N/A
Taxation benefits of additional parental income	\$313	Government	N/A
Higher earnings for children over lifetime	\$1,064	Children	N/A
Additional productivity benefits from children	\$319	Employers	N/A
Taxation benefits from children's additional lifetime earnings	\$495	Government	Yes
Reduced expenditure on special education	\$3	Government	Yes
Reduced expenditure on school repetition	\$11	Government	Yes
Reduced health expenditure	\$605	Government	Part (\$19.74m)
Reduced crime-related expenditure	\$522	Government	No
Reduced welfare expenditure	\$67	Government	Yes
Reduction in welfare payments to individuals	-\$67	Children	N/A
Other costs – additional schooling costs	-\$58	Government	Yes
Total early childhood education benefits	\$4,737		
Total benefit to government from 14-point increase in Year 3 NAPLAN results	\$595.74		

1 PWC, 2019
 2 Yu and Daragonova, 2014
 3 Australian Productivity Commission, 2019



Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Program

National Impact Report February 2021 – May 2023

The impact of the Imagination Library on
Australian children and their families



Executive summary of findings

- Children on the Imagination Library are being read to more often, for longer duration and have more books in the home compared to Australian children not on the program.
- Caregivers who read daily or more at baseline were 8 times more likely to still be reading daily or more 12 months after being on the program.
- The Imagination Library increases the use of reading techniques known to be beneficial for language acquisition and development.
- The Imagination Library increases caregiver confidence and enjoyment.
- 90% of caregivers reported spending more quality time together as a family with books.

Background

The Social and Economic Costs of Illiteracy

Poor literacy is associated with dropping out of school, decreased work productivity, lower earnings and welfare dependency (Goldfeld et al. 2011) and is linked to crime, poor health outcomes and social isolation (World Literacy Foundation, 2018). Reading failure presents enormous social and economic challenges worldwide because without the ability to read or write, many illiterate people become trapped in a cycle of poverty with limited opportunities for employment or income generation (World Literacy Foundation, 2018).

Neurological research has shown that most brain development occurs within the first three years (Li et al. 2021) and is a key predictor of education. In Australia, 1 in 5 children start school unprepared for learning (AECD 2021). In some communities, this is as high as 1 in 3 children (AECD 2021) However, there is evidence that regardless of income, children from “language rich” home environments can bridge the word gap that puts them behind their peers when they start school. (Hart & Risley, 1995)

What can be done to break this cycle?

“Helping children become excited about learning and making sure that they don’t enter school already behind their fellow classmates is extremely important for addressing illiteracy.” Put simply, ‘caregivers can combat illiteracy early by reading with their children’ (World Literacy Foundation, 2018).

There is well established evidence that shared book reading, defined as a caregiver reading with a child, is beneficial to the child’s language development and pre-literacy skills. (Dowdall et al. 2021, Fletcher et al. 2008). Along with shared book reading, the number of children’s books in the home has also been shown to be associated with children’s language and further literacy outcomes (Chen & Ren, 2019). A study conducted in 2015 found that, when the child was two years old, both the frequency of shared book reading and the number of books in the home combined with other home literacy variables were significantly associated with the child’s vocabulary skills at the age of four years (Kim et al. 2015). An earlier study by Debaryshe (1993) found that the age of onset of shared book reading was the strongest predictor of oral language skills in two-year-olds.

These findings indicate early access, the number of books in the home and the adoption of shared reading with a caregiver can have an important impact on a child's early development.

How does the Imagination Library promote early literacy?

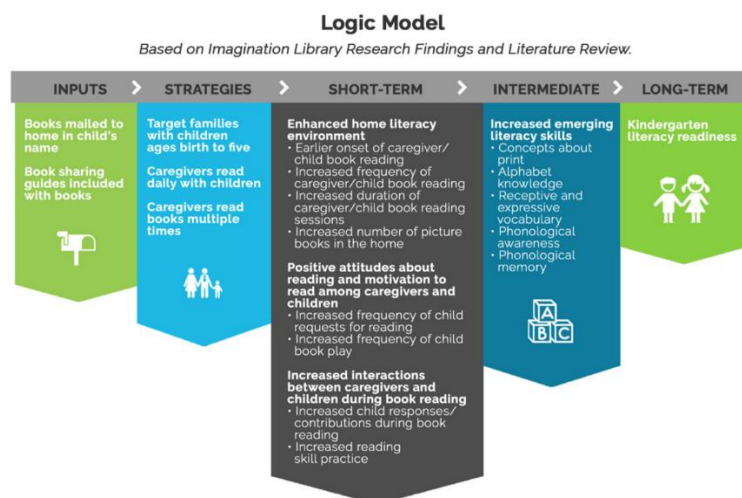
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a global book-gifting program which provides one age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, book a month, from birth to five years, (N=60 books) delivered to the mailbox addressed to the child (Conyers, 2012). These books are chosen by a book selection committee comprised of academics, early educators and speech therapists with each book accompanied by a tip sheet which guides caregivers before, during and after reading to maximise the impact of the reading session. The program has been delivered in Australia since 2014 by United Way Australia and is currently being offered in over 400 locations nationally. By providing books directly into the home the Imagination Library promotes shared book reading and helps to break the cycle of illiteracy.

Evidence for the Imagination Library literacy intervention

Research has shown that children enrolled in the Imagination Library are read to more frequently and for longer durations than those children not enrolled on the program (Funge et al. 2017, Ridzi et al. 2017). A study by Samiei et al. (2015) found that children who participated on the program were also better prepared for kindergarten. Research has also shown that caregivers with children on the program reported that they demonstrated an increased love of reading (Funge et al. 2017) and improved family communication styles (Ridzi et al. 2014) as a result of being on the program.

Aim of report

The aim of this report is to evaluate the impact of the Imagination Library on children and their families in Australia. The Dollywood Foundation developed a program logic model which outlines the short-term, intermediate and long-term goals of the Imagination Library. This report will use both quantitative and qualitative approaches of measurement to evaluate the short-term and intermediate goals from the logic model.



Methods

Survey delivery and response rate

The report analysed data from optional surveys sent to caregivers before receiving the Imagination Library, after receiving the program for 6 months, and after 12 months of being on the program. To inform the data, each response is matched to an individual caregiver-child for each survey. A total of 249 baseline and 12-month follow-up surveys were completed. N=134 caregivers completed baseline and 6-month surveys and N=92 completed all three surveys (baseline, 6 and 12 months). Data was collected from the 1st of February 2021 through to the 10th of May 2023.

Results

Caregivers

At baseline, the median age of caregivers at time of survey completion was 31-35 years, with a maximum of more than 50 years. 97% of caregivers completing the survey identified as female and 12% of caregivers reported a language other than English as their primary language. The majority of caregivers responding to the survey indicated they were not working and were either on leave or engaged in home duties at both baseline and 12 months. Approximately 50% of caregivers reported that their highest level of education was a university qualification at both baseline and 12 months.

Children

Of the N=249 children, 53% were male and 2 children were identified as having a disability. At baseline 35% were attending some form of early learning activities which increased to 70% by 12 months with 37% attending one day a week at the 12-month survey. The average age at baseline was 8.4 months (SD 10.4), the average age at the 12-month survey was 18.6 months (SD 10.6, maximum 47 months).

Logic Model – Enhanced home literacy environment

Earlier onset of caregiver / child book reading

The average age caregivers reported commencing reading to their child was 2.5 months (SD 2.8). This is earlier than the average onset of shared book-reading in Western, English-speaking countries, which usually occurs at 6 - 9 months, and is significantly earlier than the 22 months reported by Leech et al. (2021).

I recommend the program to all new Mums I come in contact with as it helps build a child's imagination and vocabulary –Imagination Library caregiver.

Reading frequency with the primary caregiver

After receiving the Imagination Library for 6 months, 71% of children were being read to 6 or more days a week which was maintained through to 12 months of being on the program. This is higher than a large Australian study (N~1,000,000) of children that found 60% of children were read to 6-7 days in the last week aged between 0-2 years (AIHW). There was a statistically significant increase in the frequency of shared book reading between baseline and the 12-month survey ($p<0.05$) and those caregivers who read daily or more at baseline were 8 times more likely to read daily or more

at the 12-month survey compared to those who did not read daily at baseline (OR 8.0, 95% CI: 4.3 – 14.6).

Monthly books are a great reminder to keep reading especially if it's fallen out of regular routine – Imagination Library caregiver.

Reading frequency with someone other than the primary caregiver

Caregiver responses demonstrated that the proportion of children being read to by someone other than the primary caregiver increased from 74% at baseline to 83% at the 12-month survey with the median frequency being 3 – 5 days a week.

I love the program it encourages me to find the time to sit and read to our son and encourages his older sibling who is autistic to be involved with reading as well. I also encourage his dad to read to him at his house too –Imagination Library caregiver.

Increase in reading duration

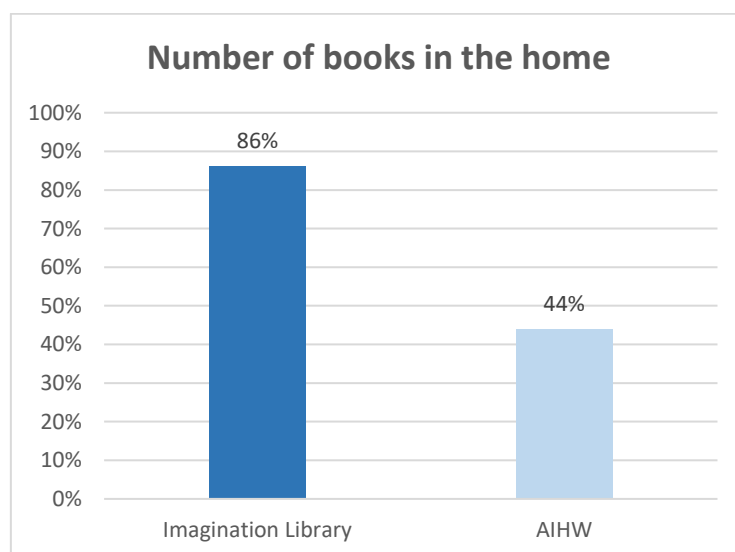
The average time spent reading remained stable from baseline to 6 and 12 months at approximately 13 minutes per sitting. The proportion of caregivers reading for 10 or more minutes a day increased from 40% to 47% from baseline and 6 months. This is higher than the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC, N~5,000) which found that only 35% of children were read to for more than 10 minutes a day between 0-1 years.

Our son and his older sister love checking the mailbox for the new monthly book. We read that book on repeat for weeks, then it becomes a part of our rotations –Imagination Library caregiver.

Number of books in the home

86% of children had 25 or more books in the home after 6 months on the program which is nearly double that of a study conducted on nearly one million Australian children which found only 44% of children had more than 25 books by 2 years (AIHW).

If it wasn't for the program, I probably wouldn't even read to my kids as much as I do, and they wouldn't have this many variety of books to be interested in –Imagination Library caregiver.



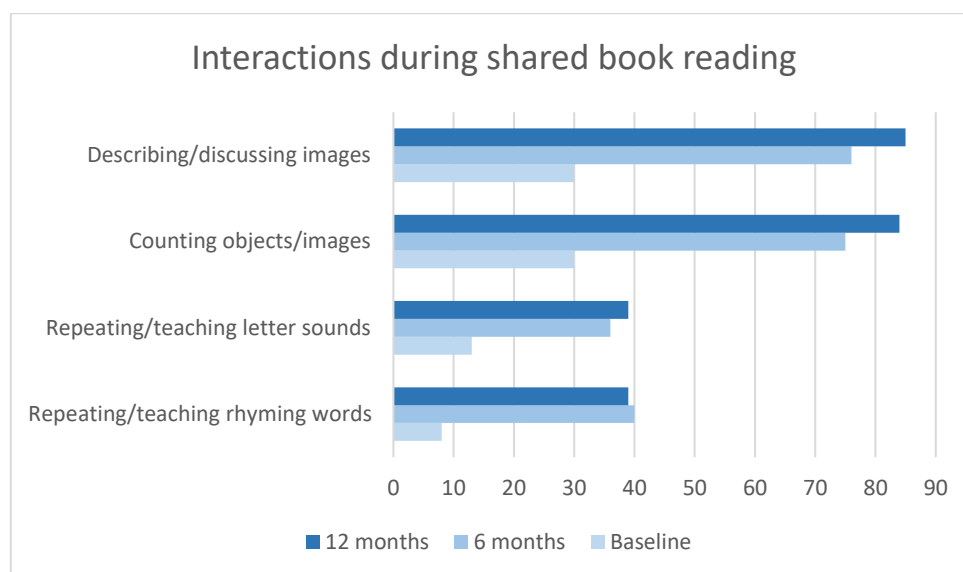
Logic Model – Increased interactions between caregivers and children during book reading

At 6 months 80% of caregivers reported that the tip sheets were useful for guiding their interactions which remained stable after 12 months.

The tip sheet is incredibly helpful for knowing what types of questions I should be asking at different stages of the books –Imagination Library caregiver.

The proportion of caregivers using and repeating rhyming words during reading time increased 5-fold from baseline to 6 months (8%-40%) and remained stable after 12 months. The proportion of caregivers repeating / teaching letter sounds nearly tripled from baseline to 6 months (13%-36%) and increased further to 40% at 12 months. The proportion of caregivers counting images / objects doubled from 30% to 75% in the first 6 months of being on the program and then increased to 84% after 12 months on the program. The proportion of caregivers describing / discussing images more than doubled from 30% to 76% in the first 6 months of being on the program and then increased to 85% after 12 months on the program. The proportion of caregivers discussing the plot increased in the first 6 months from 8% to 30% and then stabilised at 12 months.

This is a great program to encourage parents to read to their youngest and cultivate them into a book reader –Imagination Library caregiver.



Logic Model - Positive attitudes about reading and motivation to read among caregivers and children.

Among children

At the 12 month follow up survey, 87% of caregivers reported that their child responds when they point to something in the book. Caregivers reported that 69% of children indicated they would like to be read to more than 3 days in a week and 91% of parents reported that their child was interested in books. The program also increased independent book play, with 76% of parents reporting their child engaged in book related play three or more days a week.

Our daughter is only one year old I feel reading to her increases her sense and abilities to have a creative mind as she grows, she has her own personality already and doctors say she is very advanced

for her age, and I do believe some of that comes from me reading and exploring new adventures and books with her. It helps me find comfort in these books that she loves so much. When we get a new book, she gets excited in her own ways – thank you we love them –Imagination Library caregiver.

I like that the books have Australian content and themes that encourage emotional literacy – Imagination Library caregiver.

Among caregivers

After receiving the Imagination Library for 12 months, 92% of caregivers said that reading was more enjoyable for them. Similarly, 95% of caregivers agreed that they felt more confident to read to their child after receiving the Imagination Library, and 88% of caregivers said they felt more connected to the child because of reading Imagination Library books.

Thank you so much for allowing my daughter and I the opportunity to read more books together, not only is it good for her education but it allows us to bond over the books and we relate to parts of the book with different things in life –Imagination Library caregiver.

It helps me to be more in contact with my child and help him to enjoy time by us reading together and his understanding growing day after day, making voices, acting so I know his imagination is growing more and more –Imagination Library caregiver.

After 12 months, 83% of caregivers reported that the importance they place on reading had increased since receiving the Imagination Library and 90% reported spending more quality time together as a family reading because of receiving the books. After 6 months 70% of caregivers reported that they actively looked for books for their child which increased to 80% after 12 months on the program.

Awesome. A great collection of books. We thought he would prefer the more basic books, but he loves the longer ones, so now we go to the library we get longer ones too –Imagination Library caregiver.

The Imagination Library books are a fun way for us to continue to develop a love of reading as a family –Imagination Library caregiver.

Logic Model – Emerging literacy skills

N=23 children were 3 or more years at the time of the 12-month follow-up survey.

After receiving the books for only 6 months, 71% of children over three years of age demonstrated that they could follow instructions which increased to 77% after 12 months on the program. After 6 months approximately 50% of children could make letter sounds and after 12 months 81% of caregivers reported the child's vocabulary had improved. After 12 months 40% of children could recall rhymes however only 21% could name letters. 90% of caregivers reported that the child's interaction during reading time had increased.

Our son looks forward to receiving his books in the mail. When he gets them, he runs upstairs with excitement to read. He also engages with his little sister to join in the book and will point things out to her in the story –Imagination Library caregiver.

Conclusion

Children on the Imagination Library are being read to more often, for longer duration and have more books in the home than the average Australian child. These findings along with the early onset of shared book reading are encouraging as they all support the child's language and early literacy skill development. Nearly all children were interested in books and over 50% demonstrated emerging literacy skills after being on the program for 12 months. Caregiver interactions increased across all reading techniques, and they reported feeling more connected to the child, more confident to read and spent more quality time together as a family as a result of being on the program.

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